25 GREATEST NINTENDO GAMES

THE 25 GREATEST NINTENDO GAMES

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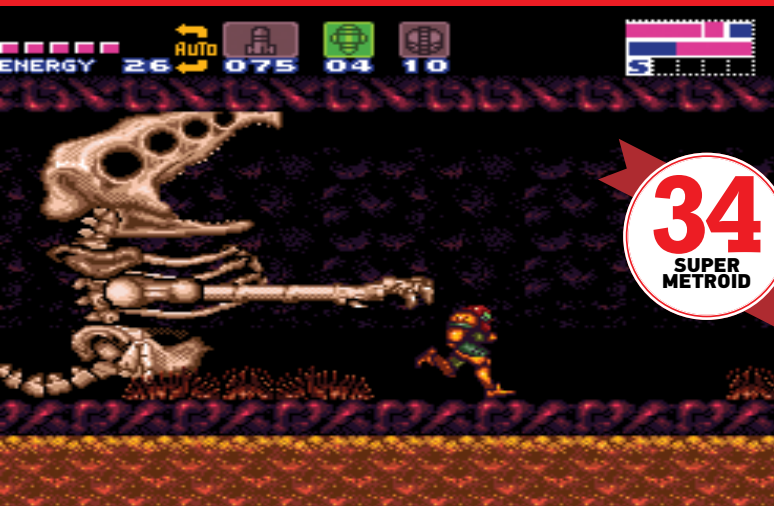
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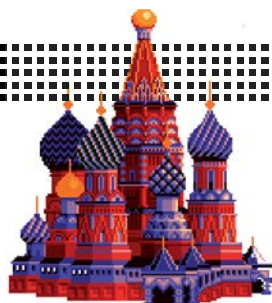
GAME CHANGERS
TETRIS

Released: 1984 **Publisher:** Various **Developer:** Various **System:** Various

It may look simplistic but there's a compelling pull to those falling blocks that make *Tetris* almost impossible to ignore.

games™ examines the industry's most important videogames, looking at their influence and what made them so great in the first place. This month we investigate Tetris, Alexey Pajitnov's addictive puzzler that remains a delightfully frustrating experience nearly three decades later

IT'S OFTEN SAID that the greatest games have simple mechanics at their core. This is particularly true of Alexey Pajitnov's *Tetris*, which has gone on to become one of the most recognisable games of all time, and, for many, is solely responsible for popularising the puzzle genre.

Tetris was created in Russia by Pajitnov and Dmitry Pavlovsky on the Elektronica 60, a Soviet Union terminal computer, while they were working at the Soviet Academy Of Sciences. Their friend, Vadim Gerasimov, who also helped with the game, was responsible for porting *Tetris* to the IBM PC. The trio had planned to create a number of different puzzle games that they would then sell (a difficult proposition in Russia at the time). One of the ideas that Pajitnov was working on for the compilation was a game called Genetic Engineering, which consisted of moving tetraminos around a screen to assemble various shapes. It wasn't fun to play, but several months later Pajitnov came up with the concept that would shape one of the most successful franchises of all time.

His new game involved the player having to assemble different shaped tetraminos as they fell into a rectangular well. The player could manipulate the falling shapes through 90 degrees with the goal being to create an unbroken horizontal line of ten blocks. If

★ MAGIC MOMENTS | THERE ARE MANY INCREDIBLE MOMENTS TO BE HAD WHILE PLAYING TETRIS – HERE ARE OUR TOP THREE
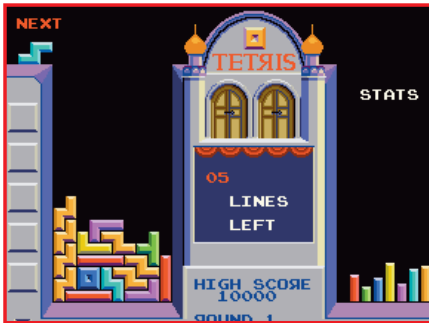
YOUR FIRST TETRIS

★ THERE'S SOMETHING magical about getting your very first Tetris. Waiting for that final four-piece block to fall into place is almost as nerve-racking as waiting for it to show up. You'll breathe a massive sigh of relief when it finally drops.

MULTIPLAYER

★ INITIALLY YOU were just playing against your best score, but it wasn't long before you were able to challenge other players. Beating the computer is fine, but there's something far more gratifying about owning a human opponent.

THE MUSIC

★ YOU HAD to wait three years for the Game Boy version to come along, but when it finally arrived it came packaged with some amazingly catchy music that perfectly captured the frantic pace of the actual game.

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this is achieved the blocks disappear and score the player points. Once a set number of lines have been cleared the level is completed and the game gets ever so slightly faster. Play continues like this until the falling tetraminos eventually reach the top of the well. Despite the addictive nature of Pajitnov's new game, now called *Tetris*, Pajitnov had trouble selling the compilation it featured on. *Tetris*, along with the other games by Pajitnov and his friends, were given out for free to friends and family and eventually found their way onto PCs outside of Soviet Russia.

■ ■ ■ PAJITNOV WAS approached by Spectrum Holobyte to publish the game in the West, which he agreed to. The other games weren't part of the deal, however, which infuriated Pavlovsky and Gerasimov, who parted ways with Pajitnov. It was the first sign of trouble for the *Tetris* creator, but it wouldn't be the last, and the sheer popularity of the game resulted in numerous legal battles in the intervening years, with a number of publishers all claiming the rights to sell various versions of the massively popular game. It wouldn't be until 1996, after Pajitnov formed The Tetris Company with Henk Rogers (who discovered the game at CES in 1988 and secured its release for the NES and Game Boy) that he began to receive royalties for his popular puzzle game.

MANY DEVELOPERS HAVE ATTEMPTED TO BETTER IT, BUT FEW HAVE SUCCEEDED

KEY FACTS

■ *Tetris* has easily adapted to each new piece of hardware. It's been ported to many machines, from consoles and computers to phones and tablets.

■ *Tetris* is one of the most, if not the most cloned game of all time. Theodor Lauppert lists over 180 clones on his site. Visit **http:// theodor.lauppert. ws/games/tetriscl. htm** for more information.

■ *Tetris* has sold millions since its release in 1984, but it's had the most success on mobile phones. While it has sold over 70 million units on home consoles, it has sold over 100 million on mobiles.

And by then *Tetris* had proven to be massively popular, particularly the Game Boy version, which has now become synonymous with Nintendo's handheld. While the NES version had shifted an impressive 8 million units, the Game Boy version dwarfed this by selling over 33 million. Admittedly, it was packaged with the device itself, but it allowed a huge number of people to experience the game.

It's the simplicity of *Tetris* that makes it so much fun to play, and while many developers (including Pajitnov) have attempted to better it, few have succeeded. *Tetris* married simplicity to tight controls and simple puzzle solving to create an amazing experience, which only deepened as later games began to offer more interesting gameplay mechanics.

For many it's the original game that remains the best, and this is mainly due to its sheer accessibility. The beauty of *Tetris* was that, while it was extremely easy to pick up, it wasn't easy to conquer, with the continuing speed increase of the game requiring godlike reflexes on its later levels. Then there was the clever scoring system it offered, delivering more points to the player if they could complete a wall that was four blocks high (known as a Tetris). The random nature of each new block meant that it was impossible to predict when the four-block rectangle would show up, meaning *Tetris* offered a suitable risk and reward factor for those that attempted to wait around for the errant block to turn up.

29 years after its original release and with millions of units sold and nearly 50 officially released sequels, *Tetris* shows no signs of slowing down. Its timeless gameplay and simple yet stylised visuals define everything we love about videogames and help keep it fresh for every new generation of gamer that discovers it. A true classic.
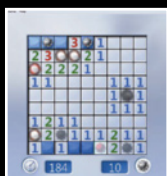
> BEFORE TETRIS

Other puzzle games we were playing before Tetris changed everything
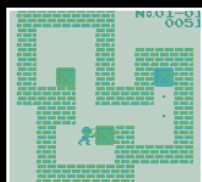
SOKOBAN
1981
■ *Sokoban* was an early puzzle game where you had to push a set number of boxes to specific points within a warehouse. Poor planning meant it was easy to trap yourself if you didn't pay attention. It would appear on numerous systems, from NEC PC-8801 to Game Boy.

MINESWEEPER
UNKNOWN
■ Most PC owners will be aware of this puzzle game as it comes with most operating systems. After being presented with a blank grid you must work out where mines are hidden using only numbers for clues. A surprisingly tense game that's still a great time-waster.
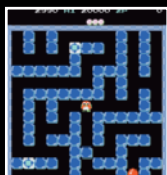
PENGO 1982
■ Excellent block-pushing game from Sega where you control a cute penguin. Kill enemies as quickly as possible by shunting blocks onto them and crushing them. Simply to play, but very tough to actually master.
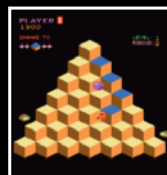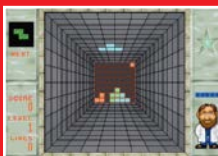
Q*BERT 1982
■ Fantastic arcade game where you play as the titular Q*bert and must bounce around an isometric level until you've turned all the blocks on screen to the same colour. Easy, apart from all the annoying monsters chasing after you...

> TETRIS SEQUELS

Far from a one-off, here are the various follow-ups that have taken the Tetris formula and played with it

WELLTRIS
1989
■ Imagine a 3D version of *Tetris* with you looking into a well. Now imagine how hard it is to play. An interesting, if complicated, follow-up.

HATRIS
1990
■ Another sequel from Pajitnov with things falling from the sky, but this time it's hats instead of tetraminos.

TETRIS BATTLE GAIDEN
1993
■ The first *Tetris* game to appear on the SNES. It features a variety of characters who can unleash special moves upon each other.

TETRIS 2
1993
■ A bizarre follow-up to the massively successful Game Boy original that has the player clearing bombs by matching lines of the same colour.

TETRIS PLUS
1995
■ Created by Jaleco, *Tetris Plus* introduces a new puzzle mode that sees you trying to clear a set number of blocks found in the well.

TETRISPHERE
1997
■ Confusing N64 exclusive where you must reveal the core of a large sphere. It's a clever concept but far too fiddly.

TETRIS: THE GRAND MASTER
1998
■ You'll need Jedi-like reflexes to play this popular Japanese exclusive, so fast the drops fall.

MAGICAL TETRIS CHALLENGE
1999
■ One of the many Vs Tetris games. This one is notable for featuring classic Disney characters.

TETRIS WORLDS
2001
■ Despite lots of game modes and a four-player mode, many felt that having blocks that no longer locked into place made it too easy.

TETRIS DS
2006
■ Excellent offering from Nintendo with clever gameplay modes based around classic characters and good use of the DS's dual screens.

TETRIS BATTLE
2010
■ This Facebook game is a fun competitive game where you must clear as many lines as possible in two minutes.

TETRIS
2011
■ The last *Tetris* released for a home console was this from EA. It's a digital release featuring the classic Marathon Mode.
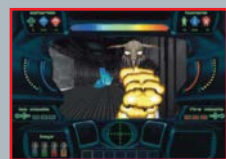
> WHAT PAJITNOV DID NEXT

How the Tetris creator followed his biggest game

WORDTRIS
1991
■ Another puzzle game with things falling from the sky, but this time it's words instead of tetraminos. *Wordtris* is a clever concept, but it's too tricky.

ICE & FIRE 1995
■ Despite a clever play mechanic revolving around the alternating use of ice and fire, this was a pretty poor shooter. Not one we would recommend when compared to others.

MICROSOFT ENT. PACK: THE PUZZLE COLLECTION 1997
■ An interesting selection of mini puzzle games similar to what Pajitnov had been involved in before *Tetris*. The game shown here is Fringer.

PANDORA'S BOX 1999
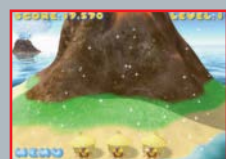■ Travel around the world and solve a vast variety of different puzzles that cover a wide array of different types. The current version has over 400 to solve.

HEXIC 2003
■ Interesting variant of the match-three game where you rotate hexes to form clusters of three or more. It was a free launch game on 360.

DWICE 2006
■ An interesting spin on *Tetris* where you must destroy incoming ice blocks and stop them from destroying the houses at the bottom of the screen.
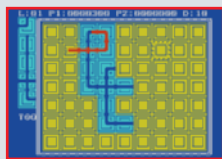
> PUZZLE GAMES INSPIRED BY TETRIS

Notable puzzle games that followed Tetris

DEFLECTOR
1987
■ An interesting puzzler from Costa Panayi that had the player manipulating mirrors to bounce a laser from one point to another.

PIPE MANIA
1989
■ Manage a flow of liquid by manipulating different pipe shapes in this excellent puzzle game from The Assembly Line.

COLUMNS
1990
■ Sega tried to capitalise on the success of *Tetris* with this simple match-three game. It's decent, but lacks *Tetris*'s addictive properties.

BEJEWELED
2001
■ Popular tile-based puzzle game from PopCap Games where you must match three jewels of the same colour. Maddeningly addictive.

LEMMINGS
1991
■ Excellent game where you have to guide a set number of suicidal lemmings with specific skills to a nearby exit.
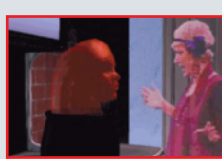
THE 7TH GUEST
1993
■ Innovative offering from Trilobyte which mixed filmed pre-rendered movie clips with some deviously designed puzzles.

PUZZLE BOBBLE
1994
■ Use the cute dinosaurs from *Bubble Bobble* to fling coloured bubbles skywards towards other coloured bubbles. Also known as *Bust-A-Move*.

PUZZ LOOP
1998
■ Stop marbles from reaching the goal by shooting additional marbles at them to form chains of three or more. PopCap created a variant called *Zuma*.

LUMINES
2004
■ This PSP launch title was a superb effort from *Rez* creator Tetsuya Mizaguchi that fuses music with block-shifting gameplay.
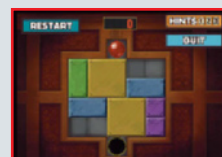
PROFESSOR LAYTON AND THE CURIOUS VILLAGE
2007
■ This charming DS offering from Level-5 mixes storytelling with clever head-scratchers to great effect. Its most recent sequel is available on 3DS.

WORLD OF GOO
2008
■ Excellent physics-based puzzler that has you trying to get a certain number of cute oozes to a nearby pipe. It gets pretty tough.
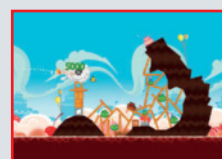
ANGRY BIRDS
2009
■ Use a catapult to fire cute birds at even cuter pigs in Rovio Entertainment's stupidly popular iOS game. There's even a theme park.

GAME CHANGERS

SUPER MARIO BROS.

Released: 13 September, 1985 (JP) **Publisher:** Nintendo **Developer:** Nintendo R&D4 **System:** NES/Famicom

The world record time for the completion of Super Mario Bros. was recently beaten: a dedicated gamer managed to finsh the game in just under five minutes!

The sequel to Mario Bros., Super Mario Bros. popularised the side-scrolling platformer and added multiplayer to what became Nintendo's flagship title

ORIGINATING AS A coin-operated game back in 1985, *Super Mario Bros.* eventually became synonymous with the NES – establishing itself as a killer app for the Eighties console. The platformer was a spiritual successor to *Mario Bros.* – a game that attracted a fair share of attention in its own right – but in adding the Super prefix (a trope that would come to define Nintendo sequels and spin-offs), the developer managed to create a game that would come to define the platform genre outright.

The game is not only a classic – generating a buzz on its Japanese and Western releases through, mostly, the rare gift of positive word of mouth – but it also stands up to the test of time. The game remains a relevant and valid example of platforming done well; *Super Mario Bros.* popularised the side-scrolling platformer, and the genre has since seen many contenders attempt to knock *Mario* off his pedestal atop the platforming throne. Few have come close, none have succeeded, and the superiority of *Super Mario Bros.* comes down to one aspect: its mechanics.

Oddly, in a world of moustachioed plumbers, lizard-dragons and Shy Guys, *Super Mario Bros.* is defined by its realistic mechanics. For an 8-bit game, the momentum and subtlety behind Mario and Luigi's movements was incredibly deft, operating on a system that you could understand from the first time you picked up the pad, yet would probably never master. The physics were analogous to real life; if you wanted to attempt a large jump, you'd have to get a running start. Conversely, if you started Mario off on a run (which was wonderfully animated with his stodgy little hands pumping up and down at his sides), you'd have to give him a margin of space to come to a stop in. Critics of the game called the mechanics slippery, but this didn't deter the fans – players who would stick with Mario and his bizarre world indefinitely – who fell in love with the peculiar momentum Mario popularised.

The bounciness of *Mario's* world also appealed to those first coming into gaming proper – jump on an enemy, and you'll have to fine-tune your landing.

DISSECT MARIO | *SUPER MARIO BROS.* IS PROUDLY PARADED BY A SLEW OF DEVELOPERS AS A HUGE INFLUENCE IN BOTH THEIR LIVES AND THEIR WORK

THE IMPENDING DEATH OF FAMICOM

★ Miyamoto was motivated to create a game that would be a respectable farewell to the NES cartridge system when Nintendo put forward the idea for a disk-based console to take its place. After talking about progressing Nintendo's 'athletic games' remit, the core idea for *Super Mario Bros.* was born.

MARIO BROS.

★ Unsurprisingly, Miyamoto's first foray into the Mario world was more of a proof of concept than anything else – it was *Super Mario Bros.* that took the franchise into the mainstream. Before, Mario had to flip turtles before stomping on them – this was deemed illogical in the revision, hence the bounciness of the platformer we have now.

ACCIDENTS

★ The shifting size of Mario was never actually intentional – in the prototype stages of development, *Super Mario Bros.* only had 'small' Mario, but when the development team altered the size of the levels and Mario stayed the same (becoming 'big'), Miyamoto decided to make Mario 'big' through power-ups.

MAGIC MUSHROOMS

★ Yep. Once the size-changing mechanic was agreed upon, Miyamoto took his influence from folk tales that were based on villagers wandering into forests, eating 'magical mushrooms' and changing sizes – hence why Mario's world became known as Mushroom Kingdom. Who would've guessed it?

It wasn't a matter of simply killing your enemies; that was only half of the battle. The game took full advantage of this, introducing an eclectic cast of villains that took full advantage of the seemingly limited scope that Mario had in his movements. Some would require tackling from above, some avoiding altogether, some only vulnerable at certain times. The power-ups – hidden in boxes that could be completely missed, if you weren't attentive enough – were sparse enough to keep the game challenging, but occurred often enough to always be *fun*, always *worth getting*. The game's level of challenge was perfectly attuned, suitable for all ages and never too easy or too hard for any party to take issue with: the bosses, too, each required dexterity and reflexes to overcome, pushing the simple A, B, and D-pad of the NES to its feasible limit without ever becoming pad-breakingly frustrating.

■■■ The enemies were complemented with level design that made the most of the tight physics, too. The need to constantly alter your vertical position after jumping was highlighted with staggered

KEY FACTS

■ *Super Mario Bros.* is the second best-selling game of all time, with a 40.24 million copies sold record – behind *Wii Sports*' ridiculous 82.45 million sales. (The fact the top two spots are held by Nintendo is telling.)

■ The score for *Super Mario Bros.* was originally a lot slower, but composer Koji Kondo upped the tempo of the six featured tracks when he saw players testing the game to match the quick pace of play

■ The original pitch for the game included a shoot-'em-up stage where Mario would fire bullets at enemies from cloud platforms

overground worlds that had high and wide platforms, forming paths into the clouds that felt wondrous and unique. The need to tune your position on-screen as you fell, and delicately press 'Jump' for differential heights, was played upon in the tighter, much more claustrophobic underground sections, too.

Both overground and underground sections were augmented by destructible environments that could throw a curve ball into the mix at any time, plopping you back on a lower level and interrupting your masterplan for completing the level in record time. On top of that, there was even a slew of secret levels tucked into various nooks and crannies of the various worlds, wresting you out of your comfort zone and throwing you into a bonus round of whacked-out weirdness. It was all part of the formula that would come to define *Mario* and his erstwhile franchise, and it was all operating at 100 per cent efficiency from the start.

Everything you'll play in a platforming game of any type nowadays inevitably owes a nod to *Super Mario Bros.*, and it's awe-inspiring to think about just how solidly Nintendo's seminal side-scroller established the genre.

SMB OPENED UP A WHOLE REALM OF POSSIBILITIES FOR INTERESTING AND DIVERSE MOVE-SET DESIGNS
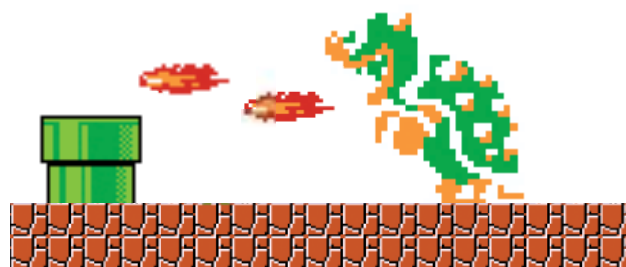
GAME CHANGERS

THE 8 BEST SUPER MARIO BROS. HACKS

THE GREAT THING ABOUT GAMES AS SIMPLY CONSTRUCTED AS SUPER MARIO BROS. IS THAT THEY ARE EASIER TO REVERSE ENGINEER THAN THEIR MODERN-DAY COUNTERPARTS. THIS LEADS TO SOME GREAT CUSTOM GAMES SEEPING INTO THE PUBLIC DOMAIN – SUPER MARIO BROS. IS FAMOUS FOR HAVING A VAST ARRAY OF HACKED VERSIONS, SO WE COMPILED OUR FAVOURITES FOR YOUR READING PLEASURE

SUPER MARIO FRUSTRATION

■ A MINEFIELD OF invisible blocks and obstacles impede your progress through every single level of this fiendish re-creation of *Super Mario Bros.* We played a few levels of it, and will happily say it's harder than *Dark Souls*. If you don't believe us, take the challenge yourself – you'll soon understand why we said it.
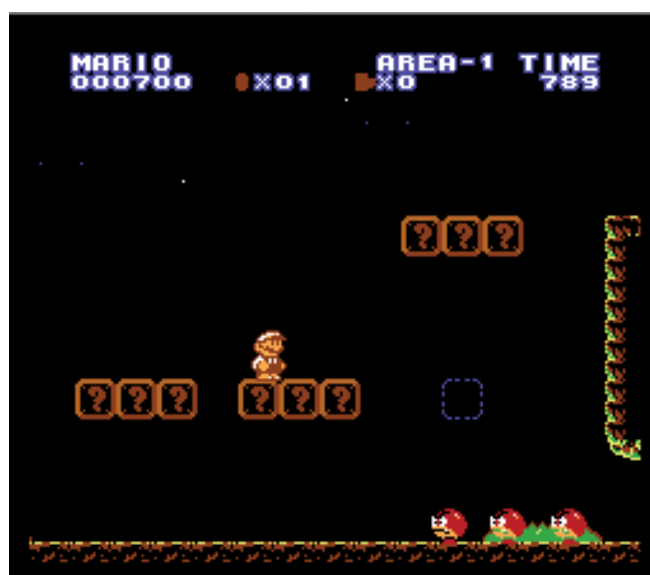
EXTRA MARIO BROS

■ A HACK THAT adds new maps, new graphics, new enemies and new power-ups to the game, *Extra Mario Bros.* sometimes doesn't hit the *Mario* template one-for-one, but it's worth playing through just to get to the final boss battle. It's quite a stretch from what you'll be used to seeing in *Mario* games, but it's worth a play.

SUPER MUSHROOM

■ REPLACING MARIO WITH Toad, *Super Mushroom* sees power-ups replaced with enemies, new sound effects added for jumping and some reworked graphics and textures. The game is apparently at a '99.9%' difficulty level and is considered one of the hardest *SMB* hacks made.

SUPREME ICE BROS.

■ A HACK THAT sees the fire power-up of Mario's replaced with an ice-based attack, *Supreme Ice Bros.* also replaces Goombas with ninjas (who receive a speed boost), sees Bowser become the devil, hidden paths in pre-existing levels and completely remade music. It's stupidly hard, too.

THE NEW STRANGE MARIO BROS.

■ INTENTIONALLY GLITCHY AND oddly designed levels are the trademark of *The New Strange Mario Bros.*, a game that gets harder as it goes on. Infamous for incorporating new g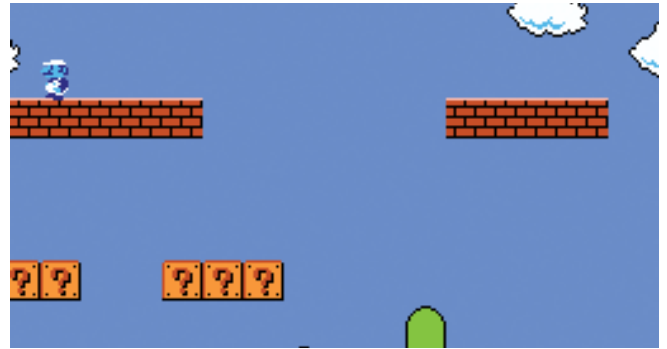raphics that messed around with how the physics of the games worked, *The New Strange Mario Bros.* really was the experience it promised
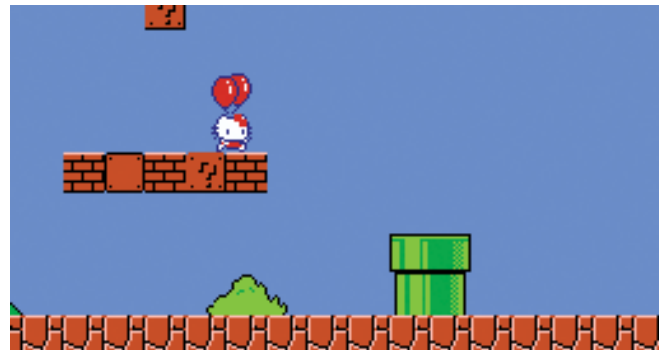
HELLO KITTY IN THE MUSHROOM KINGDOM

■ THIS BIZARRE HACK takes the sprites from the Japanese NES game *Hello Kitty World* and uses them to replace the eponymous *Bros.* of the original title. Even coming with its own story, the hack is the result of a lot of effort, and actually a surprisingly good game.

LUIGI'S FIRST QUEST: THE SEARCH FOR MARIO

■ ROLES HAVE BEEN reversed, and it's Luigi's time to shine in this hack that places the lankier, greener brother in the shoes of his stodgy younger brother. The hack includes a slew of new levels that take advantage of Luigi's higher jumping prowess.

JOE & MOE PIZZA DELIVERY

■ PROBABLY RIFFING ON the inherent stereotype-bashing inherent to Mario, *Joe & Moe* replaces the majority of the graphics in *Super Mario Bros.* and replaces them with the creator's own take on the Mushroom Kingdom. The levels have been redesigned, too, but not to a particularly high standard.

GAME CHANGERS

THE LEGEND OF ZELDA

Released: 21 February 1986   **Publisher:** Nintendo   **Developer:** In-house (Nintendo R&D4)   **System:** Famicom Disk System / NES

It's actually possible to reach the final boss of the game without ever picking up Link's iconic sword not that we would necessarily recommend it as a way to go about things.

Everyone knows *Zelda* – aside from being Nintendo's seminal RPG franchise, the series has become a symbol of gaming itself. The heroic Link is paraded around as much as Mario or Sonic. But where did it all begin and what did the first game do so right that made it stick in everyone's mind so fervently?

WITHOUT *THE LEGEND OF ZELDA*, the RPG as we know and love it today wouldn't exist. But that isn't to say that it was a true RPG in and of itself – think about the core mechanics: there are no experience points, no interchangeable characters, no 'jobs'. The original *Zelda* was, instead, a foundation, a basis for home console games in an age where the arcade ruled. *The Legend Of Zelda* was developed concurrently with *Super Mario Bros.*, both by visionary and auteur Shigeru Miyamoto, and as such he wanted the two titles to head in *very* different directions.

Super Mario Bros. was designed to be linear, to offer players the challenge of one obstacle at a time to overcome – a trial and error game that presented a single finite challenge at a time: a score attacker's paradise. *Zelda* was built to occupy the opposite space to that; it wasn't about high scores and action in sequence, it was constructed to make the player *think* about where to go next – combining textual cues with map design and environmental storytelling to help the player come to their own conclusion.

Miyamoto knew there would be no point in just sending players down into labyrinthine dungeons to find the right path amid a jumble of dead ends – he knew that, by opting for the top-down view, he had to give the players something else, something more aesthetically pleasing to carry them through this new land of Hyrule. Rumour has it that Miyamoto originally came up with the idea for *The Legend Of Zelda* as he was daydreaming, opening random desks at his drawer and imagining a unique garden within each of them – that fantasy began to build the rich Hyrulean environment, mixed with memories of his native Sonobe – fields, woods, natural caves, lakes and hills.

In building a fantasy home away from home, Miyamoto gave his game its most notable quality – creating a world that provoked wanderlust; the need

THE ANATOMY OF THE LEGEND OF ZELDA

THE LEGEND OF ZELDA SHAPED THE GAMING INDUSTRY AS WE KNOW IT – BUT WHAT WERE THE CORE COMPONENTS OF THE GAME ITSELF?


CELTIC LORE

★ Link himself is a Japanese interpretation of traditional Celtic lore – a young, beautiful hero working with nature to defeat a greater evil (think Cu Chulainn). Epona, also, is a Celtic Horse God. It may go some way to explaining how this series has always resonated in the West so well.

JAPANESE HISTORY

★ Aside from a few obvious allusions to Shintoism, the TriForce itself represents the three traditional traits a Japanese Royal Dynasty was supposed to embody. Its continued appearance in other videogames is more likely a nod back to *The Legend Of Zelda* though than to Shintoism.
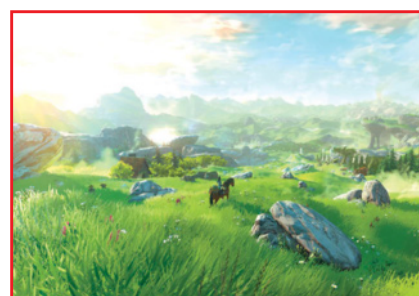
KYOTO

★ The abundance of nature in Miyamoto's home district is the reason we see so much colour and wilderness in Zelda – a staple that hasn't changed through the series as you continue to explore lush fields and forests in Hyrule and beyond. *Windwaker* was a rare departure from this.

to explore. Miyamoto intentionally made some parts of the game cryptic and difficult, to promote the idea of players communicating about what they found – about how *their* story played out. Consequently, there needed to be a satisfying payoff for going out of your way to discover something, whether it was just an item or a weapon. That payoff came with its own distinctive jingle – the 'secret found' sound byte – which has become synonymous with gaming not just for us gamers, but the mainstream, too.

This innate human quality was paired with something equally as human in Link – a young protagonist that was designed around the ideas of courage, strength and wisdom, something Miyamoto intended to encapsulate young players coming of age. You begin the story innocent and young, yet soon you're armed, motivated, ready to take on the ultimate evil – you, this ordinary person, are going to rescue royalty; the eponymous Zelda.

Yet that wasn't the end of the story – just because you rescued the princess, it didn't mean the game was over. In fact, it was really just beginning. This

MIYAMOTO GAVE HIS GAME ITS MOST NOTABLE QUALITY – CREATING A WORLD THAT PROVOKED WANDERLUST

KEY FACTS

■ The original version of the game was squeezed onto the Famicom Disk System's 112KB capacity disks

■ Nintendo bosses were originally very nervous about *The Legend Of Zelda*'s release, believing players would find the new open world concept 'boring and stressful'

■ Princess Zelda's name originally came from Miyamoto's admiration of novelist Zelda Fitzgerald, married to F. Scott Fitzgerald, whose name he thought had 'a magical sound' to it

revelation gave you an idea of how big this game was going to be; there was no 'your princess is in another castle' nonsense here. Miyamoto, again, wanted to do something different.

■■■ Aside from the innovative weaving of story and mechanics – gathering inventory and parts of the Triforce in each level (or dungeon) – the game was also the first instance of battery-based backup saving: when the title shipped to the States, on a cartridge for the NES, its internal battery allowed players to save their game and resume when they next started the system up. It seems basic now but, at the time, this was revolutionary.

Zelda's impact extends beyond that, though – it begins to shape the very foundations of the genre as we understand them today. Before the game's release, most RPGs were text-based, stat-heavy, riffing unapologetically off tabletop RPGs and high fantasy tropes established in early literature. *Zelda* came along and simplified all that – taking the best parts of fantasy world building and applying it to a simpler two-button setup.

From one man's innocuous daydreaming at his work desk, to a 25-year legacy and countless minds influenced by his concepts, *Zelda* has become as deeply ingrained in our collective cultural subconscious as *Beowulf*, Shakespeare, *Star Wars*, and *The Simpsons*. It's an essential part of worldwide culture, a game that defies that recently drawn-up line between casual and hardcore gamers. It's a beautiful anomaly – a game easily years ahead of its time. *Zelda* – its impact and its legacy – is more than just a game: it's a legend in and of itself.
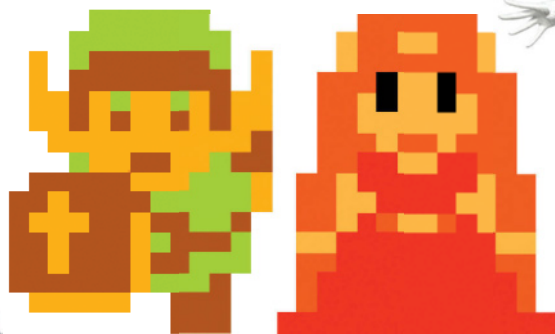
GAME CHANGERS

8 GAMES
THAT WOULDN'T
EXIST WITHOUT TLOZ

OK, SO WE KNOW THAT TITLE COULD APPLY TO A LOT MORE GAMES THAN WE'RE LISTING HERE, BUT THESE GAMES ARE *DIRECTLY* TIED INTO THE ORIGINAL *ZELDA*'S GAMEPLAY AND DESIGNS – THESE GAMES SIMPLY COULD NOT EXIST WITHOUT IT

3D DOT GAME HEROES

■ IF YOU TOOK the bitmap of *Zelda* and beefed it up, making all that 2D top-down presentation 3D, you'd pretty much end up with *3D Dot Game Heroes*. The traditional environmental secrets are in there, too, alongside some tough boss fights, pesky chickens and even a princess in need of rescue.
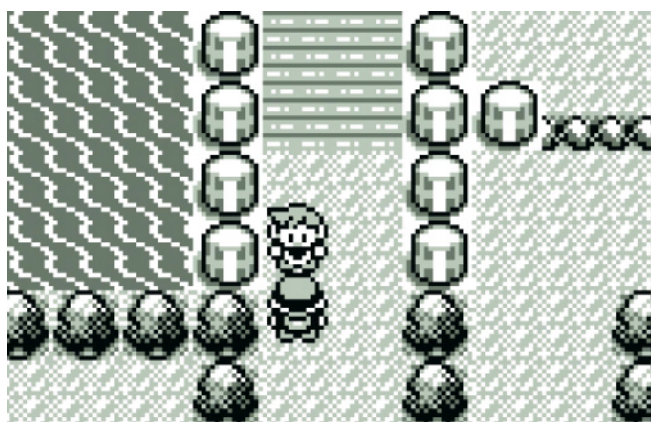
POKÉMON RED/BLUE

■ *POKÉMON* DESIGNER Satoshi Tajiri disliked the urbanisation of his local, once-rural town and designed *Pokémon* to appeal to urban kids that might have enjoyed insect collecting in times gone by. *Zelda* showed there was a market for this innocent countryside setting and convinced Nintendo to gamble on *Pokémon*.

TITAN SOULS

■ IT HAS 'SOULS' in the name, so you know what you can expect from this… inspired in part by From Software's *Souls* franchise and *Zelda*, *Titan Souls* combines all the manoeuvrability and pixel art of a top-down *Zelda*-like RPG with the brutal masochism of gaming's new pet franchise.

FOR FROG THE BELL TOLLS

■ THIS BIZARRELY TITLED Japanese RPG was developed by Miyamoto's peers over at Nintendo R&D1 some six years after *The Legend Of Zelda* was released. It was a pared-down version of the game, built on almost exactly the same mechanics but stripped back to work better on the Game Boy.
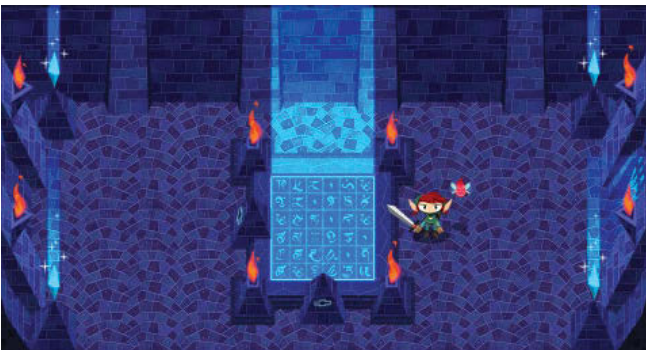
HACK 'N' SLASH

■ TO PROMOTE THE game, Double Fine's developers released a series of videos showing how they could hack the source code of *Zelda* – changing one piece of numerical data in the code to impact in-game events (invincibility, walk-through walls and so on). These hacking mechanics became the basis of the eventual game.
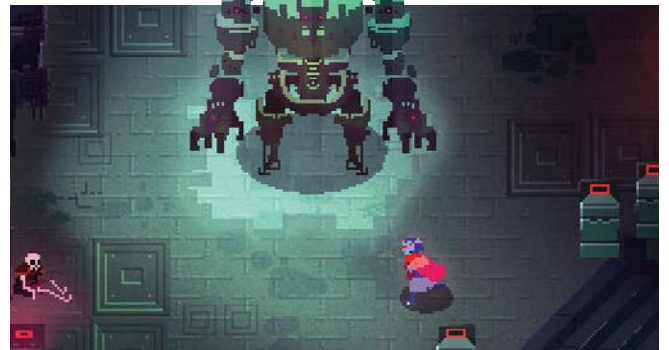
HYPER LIGHT DRIFTER

■ BY THE CREATOR'S own admission, this game is what would happen if someone got *Diablo* and *The Legend Of Zelda* and put them in a teleporter at the same time. Admittedly, developer Heart Machine quotes *A Link To The Past* as more of an influence, but the vibes *Drifter* gives off certainly owe a lot to the original *Zelda* game.

SOLEIL / CRUSADER OF CENTY

■ RELEASED IN EU regions as *Soleil*, *Crusader of Centy* was one of Sega's responses to Nintendo's hugely popular *Zelda* franchise. But due to fairly rushed development, *Soleil* was panned, lacking *Zelda*'s depth, interesting story and tricky puzzles. The game was praised for its mechanics, but these were ripped from *Zelda*.
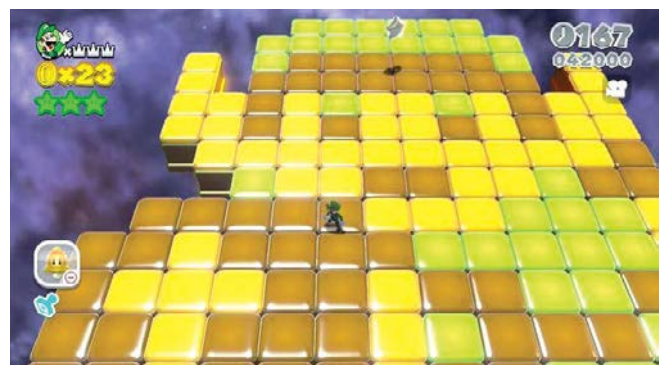
THE ZELDA LEVEL IN SUPER MARIO 3D WORLD

■ THIS IS ONLY a small section of the game, but a level nestled away as a secret sees the camera pull up and go overhead, and if you're observant, you'll notice an 8-bit Link made out of the coloured blocks that make up the majority of Super Mario 3D World's world.

GAME CHANGERS
SUPER MARIO WORLD

Released: 21 November 1990 (JP) **Publisher:** Nintendo **Developer:** Nintendo EAD **System:** Super NES/Super Famicom
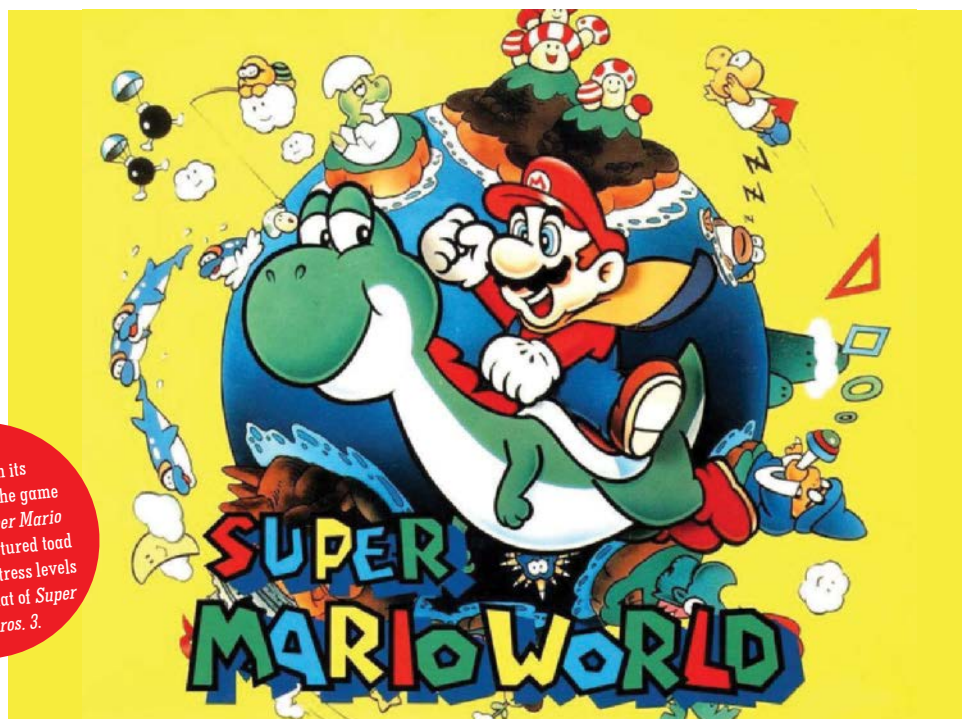
It's said that in its earliest form, the game was titled *Super Mario Bros. 4* and featured toad houses and fortress levels resembling that of *Super Mario Bros. 3.*

Having defined a genre on the NES, Nintendo perfected
its craft with this Super NES masterpiece

HOW DO YOU improve on perfection? That was the challenge Nintendo faced as it embarked on creating a new *Super Mario* game for the next-generation 16-bit Super Nintendo. Somehow, Shigeru Miyamoto and his team found a way.

If there were ever an actual scientific study into why videogames are fun, *Super Mario World* would be the main case study. It's a masterclass in finely tuned game design. A feat of engineering that, above all else, honed the very core of what makes all *Super Mario* games so special: physics.

The pre-PlayStation, 2D era of gaming was saturated with side-scrolling platformers no doubt looking to feed off the phenomenal success Nintendo had enjoyed with its mascot throughout the Eighties. While they had all of the face-value features – a cartoony character, a quirky world, and the simple ability to jump, what set *Mario* games apart was a tactile connection between player and plumber that other platformers could rarely replicate.

It's this physics-based game of momentum management that *Super Mario World* nailed. Mario was more controllable than ever before, but still maintained that tangible sense of mass. You were still engaged in what is essentially a battle against Mario's motion, but in *Super Mario World* you felt like you could bounce Mario through levels with the speed and precision of a surgeon with his scalpel.

It's ironic: Sega sold *Sonic* as the super-fast platformer, but while *Sonic's* latter stages stunted his speed by punishing players who tried to rush through its barrage of awkwardly-placed obstacles, *Super Mario World* featured impeccable level design that rewarded fast, flowing play. Those who learned to carry Mario's speed from one platform to the next could make daunting chasms seem a nuisance.

Mario's nimble responsiveness and sharp movement combined with a collection of ingeniously composed sound effects to create an almost

A WORLD OF SUPER MARIO | SUPER MARIO WORLD'S LEGACY STRETCHES FAR BEYOND THAT CURRY-STAINED SNES CART
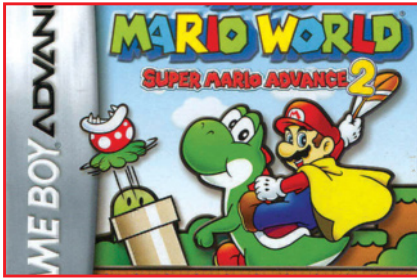
GRAB THE PORTS

★ Purists will know that the GBA version was made easier, perhaps for the small screen. However, you can get fairly vanilla *SMW* action from the Virtual Console offerings on Wii and Wii U. The latter is glorious in HD.

WATCH THE CARTOON

★ *Super Mario World* spawned a cartoon of its own that spanned across 13 episodes and made several nostalgia-inducing nods to the game with music, locations and characters lifted straight from the SNES classic.

GO FOR A SPEED RECORD

★ *Super Mario World* still has a highly active and still-evolving speed-running community – madly skilled folk who sprint through the game in record times. The ten-minute barrier has been smashed. You think you're good at *Mario*?

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inexplicably satisfying tactility with everything Mario does. Then there's that cape. Very little about the Mario universe makes any sense, but the cape item and its gliding manoeuvre introduced admittedly quirky, yet technically impressive aerodynamics. Mario had to sprint to build up speed and then, like the superheroes he's obviously parodying, he would thrust skywards, before nose-diving and using his speed to catch the wind in his cape.

Unlike other *Mario* power-ups, which offered the player an instantly accessible buff, the cape required skill to be used to its fullest. The timing required to keep Mario airborne was tricky, but once mastered, it could allow him to soar through an entire stage, and even access otherwise impossible-to-reach areas.

The jump to 16-bit tech did wonders for *Mario*, and the overworld map was a spectacle of curiosity as you wondered what challenges each area held. Levels looked better than ever with details that made *Super Mario Bros. 3* look archaic. Lava glowed with heat and caves echoed with every sound. Dark levels that forced Mario to activate a light switch before proceeding were ingenious back in 1991.

THE JUMP TO 16-BIT TECH DID WONDERS FOR MARIO, AND THE OVERWORLD MAP WAS A SPECTACLE OF CURIOSITY

KEY FACTS

■ It apparently took 16 people around three years to develop the game. Miyamoto was said to have been dissatisfied with the end result due to a lack of character emotion, but has since said it is his favourite *Mario* game.

■ The GBA version seemed identical, but it was actually made easier; when hit, a powered-up Mario (flower/cape etc.) would become big Mario. In the original, a hit taken in any form would result in small Mario status.

■ Much of the music in the game is actually the same simple melody played at different speeds.

Mario could even jump onto the back of a green dinosaur we'd come to know as Yoshi. Even that was a technical feat back then; Miyamoto is said to have wanted to include Yoshi in earlier *Super Mario* games, but the NES proved incapable of such a feat.

This was Yoshi's debut appearance. Little did we know how much of a star he would become in later years. In *Super Mario World*, Yoshi was little more than a whimsical sidekick that Mario would ride on through stages for his powerful ability to eat any threats in Mario's path. So trivial was Yoshi, that Mario would ditch him remorselessly when he needed an extra kick of altitude.

■■■ Perhaps the best testament to the quality of *Super Mario World* is how well it's stood the test of time. While previous games in the series clearly show their age, *Super Mario World* seems immortal. Its simple, yet charming 2D sprites still look fantastic on a massive 1080p display, its music still has players whistling along in nostalgic glee, and its difficulty curve transitions smoothly from a stroll on a pleasant Sunday morning to a cage fight with a pack of pitbulls. These were the days when videogames actually tried to kick your arse.

It's only deserving, then, that Nintendo has offered no shortage of ways to experience its retro masterpiece over the years. The GBA version, *Super Mario Advance 2: Super Mario World*, brought the game to the portable screen, and both the Wii and Wii U have been graced with a digital version of the game via their respective marketplaces.

Super Mario World continues to place high up in 'best game of all time' lists, and so too should it be high on your list of golden oldies to relive whenever the chance should arise.

10 THINGS YOU (PROBABLY) DIDN'T KNOW ABOUT SUPER MARIO WORLD

YOU'VE LOVED IT FOR OVER TWO DECADES, BUT DO YOU KNOW ALL THERE IS TO KNOW ABOUT SUPER MARIO WORLD?

Super Mario World — Super Mario World All - Stars

A NEW-LOOK LUIGI

■ THE VERSION OF *Super Mario World* that was included in special editions of the *Mario All Stars* compilation appeared identical at first. But, among a number of tiny changes, there was one difference that's so glaring you'll wonder how you never noticed: the *All Stars* version contains a different sprite for Luigi. In the original, Luigi was simply a green Mario, but in *All Stars*, Luigi got his own artwork.

THE HIDDEN DEMO

■ A DEMO VERSION of *Super Mario World* was tucked away in *Super Smash Bros. Brawl*, Nintendo's all-star fighter for Wii. The snippet of SNES classic could be unlocked within the game's Masterpieces mode, which offered several bite-size chunks of retro Nintendo games. To unlock the *Super Mario World* demo, you had to Brawl on the Yoshi's Island stage three times. Simple.

MARIO GETS A VOICE

■ AMONG THE MANY differences in the GBA version of *Super Mario World*, one of the cooler enhancements was the introduction of Mario and Luigi's voices. The previously speechless plumbers were given voices in the handheld remake, performed by Charles Martinet, the now-famed 'Voice of Mario'. The GBA game also got a full intro in which Mario and Luigi showed Peach their mad cape flying skills.
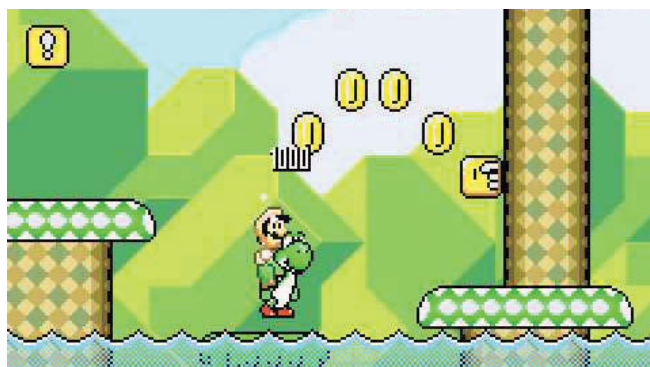
THE BETTER BROTHER?

■ IN THE ORIGINAL *Super Mario World*, both brothers perform identically, despite their different taste in colours. In the GBA port, however, Luigi discovered his now-iconic jump height advantage. While harder to control, if players encountered a tricky jump they could use Luigi, who could bound that bit higher. Purists would argue that this is not how the levels were originally designed to be played.

GLITCHES GALORE

■ *MARIO* FANS HAVE uncovered a large number of quirky tricks and glitches in *Super Mario World*. For example, did you know you can trick the game into letting you hold a shell while climbing a vine? Or use Yoshi to create a glitch reserve item that would offer you a floating-cloud item used to make the final Bowser boss fight easier? If you didn't, search for speed run videos by YouTuber 'dram551'.

ALL IN A DAY'S WORK

■ THERE ARE A total of 96 exits in the game, but of course, you knew that already, right? What you may not have known is that, going directly via the Star Road secret world, it's possible to reach the end of the game in just 12 stages, and speed runners have perfected this route to crank out completion times under the ten-minute mark without using any tool-assists.

SPECIAL ZONE'S MUSICAL SECRET

■ THE THRILL OF discovering the Special Zone in *Super Mario World* is a fond memory for many long-time fans, but the secret world harboured more surprises. If you left the game to play the Special Zone's overworld music through a couple of loops, you will then be treated to a remix of the original *Super Mario Bros.* theme. It only took 30 seconds of waiting to hear it, so it doesn't take much patience.

THE YOSHI BEAT

■ ONE OF THE lesser appreciated firsts was the bongo-drum remixes of background tunes whenever Mario saddled up on Yoshi. This has, over the years, become a tradition for Yoshi now, with the concept having stood the test of time with appearances in *Super Mario Sunshine* and, more recently, *Super Mario Galaxy 2*. Wherever there's Yoshi, a mystery man with set of bongo drums is sure to follow.
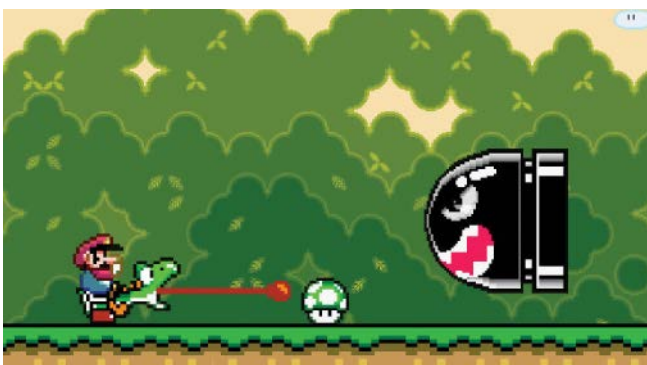
SING-ALONG SONG

■ WE'VE LOVED THE *Super Mario World* soundtrack for years, but as kids we were far too engrossed in trying to beat the game to notice that a large number of the game's background tracks are actually just remixed versions of the same melody. Legendary Nintendo composer Koji Kondo is said to have played the notes out manually, before coming up with several themed alternatives.

STUCK IN THE THIRD DIMENSION

■ *SUPER MARIO WORLD* may have marked the start of a new console generation, but it would also mark the end of era for the porky plumber. No one would have predicted that it would be the last traditional 2D *Mario* platformer for some 15 years – *New Super Mario Bros. for DS* brought its 2D platforming hiatus to an end in 2006, followed by 2009's *New Super Mario Bros. Wii*.

GAME CHANGERS

THE LEGEND OF ZELDA: A LINK TO THE PAST

Released: 21 November 1991 **Publisher:** Nintendo **Developer:** Nintendo EAD **System:** SNES

The Legend Of Zelda: A Link To The Past will be celebrating its 25 anniversary in 2016, proving once again that Nintendo is more than capable of producing quality that stands the test of time

The action adventure that defined the 16-bit era, A Link To The Past captured the hearts and attention of a generation; its influence is still felt across the gaming landscape today

IT'S DIFFICULT TO even imagine what state the adventure genre would be in now were it not for the release of *The Legend Of Zelda: A Link To The Past*. It was a truly pivotal step for a franchise that found itself flagging after a contentious side-scrolling effort in *Zelda II: The Adventures Of Link*. It introduced many of the series' most iconic items and themes, not to mention helping to quickly establish the Super Nintendo Entertainment System as one of the most impressive gaming consoles of all time. *A Link To The Past* is one of the critical reasons the brand carries as much respect and reverence as it does to this day.

It's a testament to *A Link To The Past*'s quality that we are still talking about it with such admiration, almost 25 years since its original November 1991 release in Japan (it arrived in the West a few long months later) under the banner of *The Legend Of Zelda III: The Triforce Of The Gods*. But that sort

of quality isn't created overnight. *A Link To The Past* spent over three years in incubation – originally in contention for release on the NES – before development shifted across to the fledgling SNES system.

As if launching on all-new hardware wouldn't have been challenging enough for the creative pairing of Takashi Tezuka and Shigeru Miyamoto, Nintendo EAD also made a significant stride forward for plastic-encased experiences, with *A Link To The Past* becoming one of the first games to make use of 8-megabit cartridges. Of course, that extra storage space was put to good use; it freed Nintendo developers up to make one of the most detailed and expansive games of the 16-bit era.

The two parallel game overworlds were remarkable, the dozen or so dungeons surprisingly complex, and the variety

BEST BOSS

**| A LINK TO THE PAST FEATURED WICKED BOSS
| DESIGN, THESE ARE THREE OF THE BEST**

UNEARTHING LANMOLAS

★ These pesky worms caused a ton of problems for players back in the day, with Link having to judge where the three worms would emerge before desperately hacking at them.

BATTLING MOLDORM

★ So beloved was this boss battle that Nintendo saw fit to bring it back for the 3DS sequel *A Link Between Worlds*; Moldorm can only be damaged by slicing away at its tail.

THE MIGHTY GANON

★ After fighting through both worlds, you'll be more than ready to take on Ganon. The battle doesn't disappoint, with the evil being rolling through multiple incarnations.

in boss and enemy types wildly impressive. And to think, it all started with a young boy receiving telepathic messages from a princess locked up in a dungeon by a creepy wizard. It's a little silly, but it also carries an innocence that's lost on modern triple-A design today. Who could forget that first journey into the wild land of Hyrule? Marvelling at the beauty of the 16-bit world while rain lashed down around you; sneaking through the screen-dwarfing Hyrule Castle before first taking up arms with your trusty sword and shield. It's arguably one of the most visually impressive and atmospheric beginnings ever in a Nintendo title.

The tens of hours to be found after that opening gave us one of Link's greatest adventures. Despite being a prequel, it successfully introduced many gameplay mechanics, locations and items that have become hallmarks of the *Zelda* franchise – not to mention inspired swathes of imitators in the years that would follow. The power of the SNES and the increased space on the cartridge meant Nintendo could experiment with the genre, expanding its horizons and successfully escaping the crushing linearity that plagued other adventure games of the era.

For the first time, Link could swing his sword in an arc, as opposed to stabbing clumsily at enemies stationed in front of him, and he could finally pirouette for a stunningly deadly spinning attack, which resulted in more dynamic and challenging enemy encounters to compensate for the

NINTENDO WAS FREE TO DEVELOP ONE OF THE MOST DETAILED AND EXPANSIVE GAMES OF THE 16-BIT ERA

KEY FACTS

■ Back when the SNES first launched, it was common for developers to make games within the cartridges limited 4-megabit storage space. *A Link To The Past* broke this rule by using 8-Mbit cartridges, giving Nintendo the space required to create a truly expansive world for Link to adventure through.

■ Because the game launched back in the days before the internet, this little secret went completely unnoticed for years; the Chris Houlihan room is a hidden area that you get sent to if the game crashes – named after the winner of a 1990 *Nintendo Power* contest winner.

young hero's increased prowess. The Master Sword and its rite of worth-proving passage was first introduced here too, as was the trusty Hookshot – for navigating impossible dungeon chasms – the speedy Pegasus boots, pieces of heart, and yes, even the Ocarina were there to be found on your adventure to defeat Agahnim and Ganon.

■■■ Ultimately, *A Link To The Past's* greatest victory was how it pulled the rug out from under gamers across the world. It cleverly lulled you into a false sense of security; after chasing three magic pendants to release the Master Sword – giving you the power to defeat Agahnim and save the princess – the end felt in sight. That couldn't be further from the truth. Instead, you are whisked away to the Dark World, a mysterious and warped reflection of the Hyrule you'd already spent so many hours exploring and enjoying. Zelda was suddenly locked away in Ganon's Tower and another seven dungeons – each containing a descendant of the mythical Seven Sages – were there to be conquered. Up to this point, gamers had never experienced such opportunity for exploration. You could travel between the Light and Dark Worlds, complete quests, search for rupees and items freely to aid your quest; it was almost as if Nintendo had magically packaged an entire second game into the cartridge.

A Link To The Past has stood the test of time. Spawning numerous re-releases and even a fully-fledged sequel in 2013's *A Link Between Worlds*, it's no surprise that the SNES version is so fondly remembered. It's the game that established many story beats and mechanics that would now be blazingly referred to as RPG clichés if featured in any modern adventure; it created the template that *The Legend Of Zelda* would continue to reuse to great success for over two decades; and, perhaps most impressively, it proved that videogames would no longer need to compromise on their creative visions because of technical limitations. It's as legitimately enjoyable and enthralling to play today as it was when it first released, and that's the sign of a true game-changer.

GAME CHANGERS

EIGHT GAMES THAT EMBRACED A LINK TO THE PAST'S DARK WORLD

THESE GAMES OWE A LOT TO LINK AND HIS JOURNEYS BETWEEN DIMENSIONS

ALAN WAKE (2010)

■ Hidden beneath the black waters of Cauldron Lake is The Dark Place; *Alan Wake*'s supernatural homage to the dark world of *A Link To The Past*. It's a place where the darkness thrives, causing creative works of art to manifest themselves in reality. It's a twisted mirror image of the natural world and sets the scene for the best moments of Remedy's action thriller.

DEADLY PREMONITION (2010)

■ A lot of *Deadly Premonition* makes little sense; it's a glorious celebration of the works of David Lynch in a messy adventure. It's also intimately weird in ways Lynch – confined by his chosen format – could never replicate, thanks to what bleeds out of the distorted Otherworld. A complex hallucination or a nightmare made reality? We'll likely never know.

SILENT HILL (1999)

■ Honestly, the entirety of *Silent Hill* could be seen as some dark world parallel of our own, but the Konami classic does have a tendency to shift between two dangerous locales. There's the main state, a fog-shrouded town where horrors lurk in the shadows, and then there's the rusted and bloodied nightmare mirror of it; as if it weren't scary enough already.
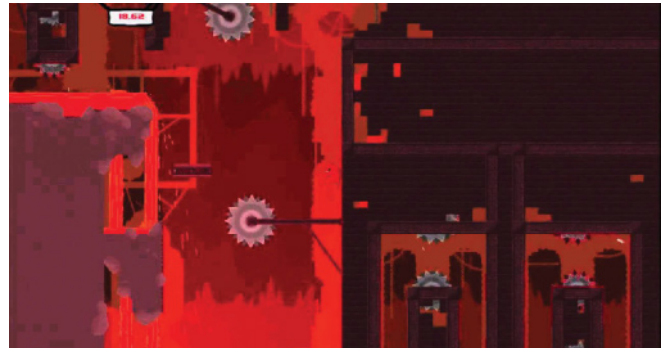
SUPER MEAT BOY (2010)

■ Just as *A Link To The Past* cleverly used a dark world to prolong the game experience, Team Meat used a similar tactic to keep you locked into the finger-breaking nightmare that was *Super Meat Boy*. Once you think you've mastered the game it goes and throws you through a gauntlet of hell in stupidly difficult dark world versions of the original levels.

METROID PRIME 2: ECHOES (2004)

■ *Metroid Prime 2: Echoes* was a stunning must-own for the GameCube, but it's also a masterful showcase of how a dark world can enhance a game. The game asks you to venture through dangerous territory as it is, before then forcing you to delve into an arid and bleak mirror of it against tougher enemies and life draining shadows.

DOOM 3 (2004)

■ *Doom 3* is ridiculous, but it's also a fine example of how to scare a generation of gamers silly. As if running and gunning your way through a mutant-infested base on Mars wasn't bad enough, it also has you slipping in and out of the Alternate Dimension Hell, which sees reality flicker, chucking blood-streaked walls, screams and skeletal corpses at you.

DRAGON AGE: ORIGINS (2009)

■ *Dragon Age: Origins* may make itself out to be a high-fantasy adventure for a lot of the time you're with it, but it does have its moments of extreme *The Legend Of Zelda* homage. The Fade is essentially BioWare's dark world; a flawed and corrupt landscape forged by the dreams of doomed spirits and mortals crossing over the void of life and death.

LEGACY OF KAIN: SOUL REAVER (1999)

■ One of the best examples of a dark world integrated fully into a game, *Soul Reaver* saw you diving into a spectral realm to solve difficult puzzles and fight off soul-sucking monsters that would relentlessly hunt you. It cleverly shifted the geography, twisting the landscape to create new paths and routes through the game, albeit with tougher difficulty spikes.

GAME CHANGERS

SUPER MARIO KART

Released: 1 September 1992 **Publisher:** Nintendo **Developer:** Nintendo EAD **System:** SNES

The Japanese *Super Mario Kart* features animations of Peach and Bowser chugging away at champagne. This was removed in the NA version of the game.

The SNES' most famous racer wasn't meant to be a Mario game when it was first being developed, but when the programmers decided to shift their efforts to a Mario Kart game, they never knew they'd change gaming forever

SUPER MARIO KART is widely acknowledged as the game that started an entire genre – without it, we wouldn't have the mascot kart racing games we know and love today. As with the majority of other Nintendo games, *Super Mario Kart* was a trailblazer – a game that inspired many clones and imitators, but no one could live up to the incredible formula that Nintendo worked into the game, creating something that was incredibly accessible to players of all ages, but still incredibly deep, once you lifted the hood and understood how the game actually worked.

Less than two years after *Super Mario Kart*'s release, long-time *Mario* rival *Sonic* released his own kart game (*Sonic Drift*), followed by Ubisoft's *Street Racer* on the SNES in 1994. The impact of the game's release was tangible on the whole industry – it created the genre, that's a given, but it also proved that games and their characters were never limited to just one game style. *Super Mario Kart* was the first time we saw *Mario* characters outside a platform game setting, and their collective transition to this new realm was groundbreaking.

But the game didn't start development as a *Mario* game – rather, the karts were populated with a generic man in overalls as placeholder art. When the team at Nintendo EAD was designing the sprites, they collectively decided that a character in a kart should be three 'heads' high – that way, you identify each racer and their kart easily enough, without too much strain. It was only about three months into

THE ANATOMY OF SUPER MARIO KART

SUPER MARIO KART HAS GONE ON TO INSPIRE A SLEW OF OTHER GAMES, BUT WHAT CAME TO INSPIRE THE NINTENDO DEVS BEHIND THE KART RACER IN THE FIRST PLACE?

F-ZERO

★ Nintendo wanted to make *Mario Kart* in order to stand alongside the single-player focused *F-Zero*, so that the console had broader appeal.

MARIO

★ Originally, a 'man in overalls' replaced Mario as kart driver, but this was changed when the dev team decided to test what it would look like having Mario in the game.

JAPANESE FOLKLORE

★ The 'thwomps' in *Mario Kart* are based on the 'nurikabe' in Japanese folklore: ugly, square spirits that take the form of walls to impede progress.

development that Nintendo decided to make the whole game a *Mario*-focused racer.

The general idea with the development of *Super Mario Kart* was to create a game that directly contrasted with SNES launch title *F-Zero* – a single-player only game with intricate tracks and elaborate mechanics. That way, the Nintendo console would have something for the lone-wolf racers out there, and something for the families and multiplayer-focused groups of gamers, too.

It was the multiplayer functionality of the game that got most people's attention when the game launched – it was a true party game on the home consoles, and one of the first to really hit that friendly/competitive nail on the head. This gameplay was no accident: Nintendo and Miyamoto actively set out to make a game capable of displaying two players on the same game screen simultaneously – something evident in the way single-player games are *still* split across the screen horizontally.

Because of the multiplayer focus, tracks and levels couldn't be as complex as the zones you'd find in *F-Zero*, but that actually ended up working in *Mario Kart*'s favour: the simplicity of the tracks meant the game was as pick-up-and-play as you could get – easy to learn, difficult to master. But within that

KEY FACTS

■ Each character 'sprite' is actually rendered from 16 different angles, impressively giving that 3D illusion on a 2D plane

■ *Super Mario Kart* is the first non-platform game to feature *Mario* characters

■ *Super Mario Kart* managed to hit nine million sales during the lifetime of the SNES, the third-best on the console

simple formula, there are smaller ways Nintendo plays with the layout: between small shortcuts, zany power-ups and track-based boosts, very few races played out the same. At first look, each track was just a circuit with a finish line, but the more you play, the more you understand how the visual language of the track is actually pointing you at a certain shortcut or hidden feature. This played into the longevity of the game, and is largely the reason you *still* see tournaments of players competing in the game's time trial mode.

■■■ The game also made the most of Nintendo's internally-developed Mode 7 texture wrapping – a technical marvel that made *Super Mario Kart* one of the best-looking games on the SNES (by a long way). Mode 7 allowed developers to select planes that were being worked on and rotate them freely, basically making 3D sprites in 2D software (or, at least, giving that illusion). To that end, *Super Mario Kart* introduced the DSP-1 chip – that's Digital Signal Processor – into the cartridge, which allowed easier and quicker 3D mathematics from the game's engine, courtesy of floating point calculations. The implementation of this chip paved the way for the rest of the SNES' lifespan: it became the most popular chip in SNES cartridges from then on.

Super Mario Kart has a place in many people's hearts because of the nostalgia that it evokes – that isn't down to the progressive programming, innovative gameplay or charming art direction alone. No, it rather pulls on something deeper – the idea that this game was mostly enjoyed by groups of people; friends, families, colleagues and so on. It's a game that – to some circles – is as important socially as it is culturally.

THE GAME WAS AS PICK-UP-AND-PLAY AS YOU COULD GET – IT WAS EASY TO LEARN, DIFFICULT TO MASTER
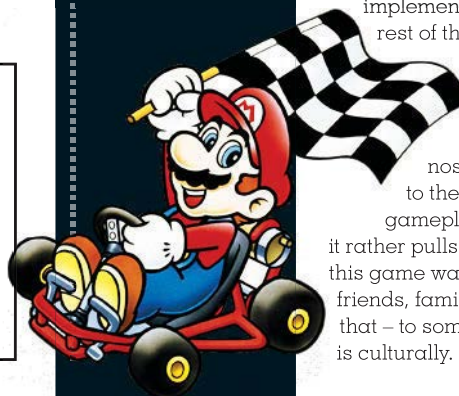
GAME CHANGERS

8 OTHER GAMES INSPIRED BY MARIO KART

SUPER MARIO KART WAS THE FIRST KART GAME TO HIT OUR CONSOLES, BUT IT WASN'T THE LAST. THE GAME'S RELEASE HERALDED THE START OF A NEW GENRE, AND OTHER DEVELOPERS VIED FOR THEIR CHANCES ON KART-RACING THRONE

CRASH TEAM RACING
■ THE FINAL *CRASH* game by Naughty Dog was designed with the same focus on replayability and metagame as *Crash 3: Warped*. Developers slotted design pillars into the kart-racing genre instead. It was a well-regarded *Mario Kart* clone. Controls were tight, so players could focus on maintaining speed and fun.

SONIC & SEGA ALL-STARS RACING
■ *ALL-STARS RACING* doesn't reinvent the wheel, but everything it does, it does well. Track design is multi-faceted and entertaining, complex but not confusing, and represents the height of what a kart racer can do. Multiplayer modes and presentation of the game made it the best kart game of the PS3/360 era.

SOUTH PARK RALLY

■ DESPITE THE LACK of involvement from Trey Parker and Matt Stone (and their criticism of the *South Park* games that Acclaim published), we had a soft spot for *South Park Rally*. It was a clunky and floaty mess, but as a mascot kart racer, it was fun, fast, full of fan service and had a multiplayer that actually worked.

CHOCOBO RACING

■ *CHOCOBO RACING* IS the closest you're going to get to a *Final Fantasy* kart game, compiling characters, locations and items from *Final Fantasy* to *Final Fantasy VIII*. SquareSoft attempted to cash-in on the kart craze that permeated the industry: tracks were lazy, controls loose and unsatisfying, and it was very, very easy.

LITTLEBIGPLANET KARTING

■ *LITTLEBIGPLANET KARTING* FELT more like a game from the parent series than a pure kart game, as the main reason for its release was to get players making their own tracks, based on a template laid out in it, and in *ModNation Racers* before. The game never felt like a true craft-em-up, nor a true kart racer.

LEGO RACERS

■ THE BRIGHT, COLOURFUL and clean graphical presentation of the first Lego racing game was impressive, as were the world design and track design, but the rudimentary physics engine in the game was where it shone: the car would handle differently, making for a game that was ostensibly fun and experimental.

DIDDY KONG RACING

■ DESPITE THE WELL-ANIMATED characters, vibrant colour palette and fast-action racing, *Diddy Kong Racing*'s multiplayer modes and the replay value were poor. The game had an excellent Adventure mode and excelled when it came to the subtlety in the mechanics – more so than its Nintendo predecessor, *Mario Kart 64*.

SONIC DRIFT

■ RELEASED ON THE Game Gear, *Sonic Drift* was a lazy and cynical cash-in on *Mario Kart* – a game that didn't seem to understand what made *Super Mario Kart* so successful. Few options, four playable racers and bland track designs meant *Sonic Drift* never really had a chance at competing with *Super Mario Kart*.

BEHIND THE SCENES

DONKEY KONG COUNTRY

It's been 20 years since British studio Rare rebooted one of Nintendo's first mascots, giving us the ideal excuse to uncover the history of this smashing SNES title
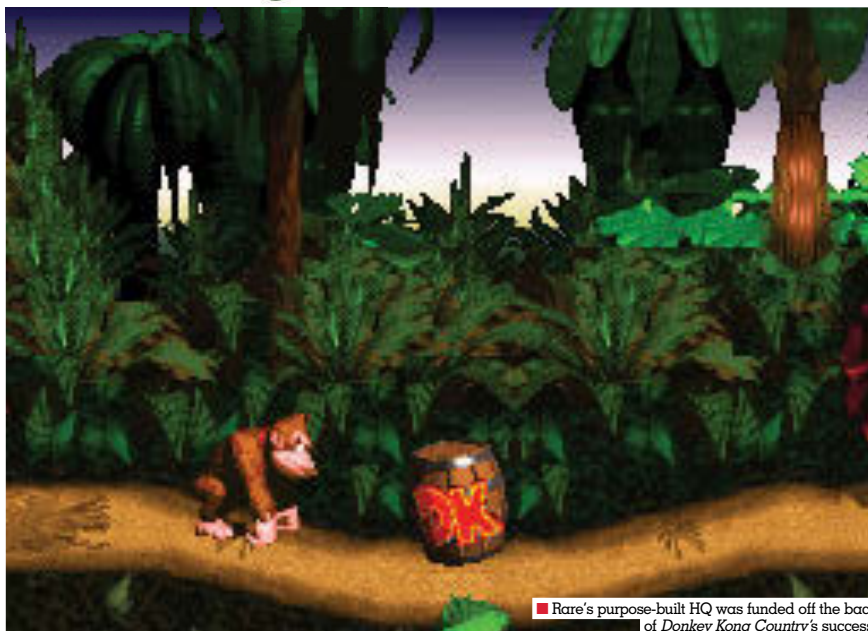
Rare's purpose-built HQ was funded off the back of *Donkey Kong Country*'s success.

Released: 1994
Format: SNES
Publisher: Nintendo
Key Staff: Gregg Mayles (Designer), Tim Stamper (Producer), Chris Sutherland (Lead Programmer), Brendan Gunn (Programmer), David Wise (Music)

PRETTY MUCH EVERY game development studio of note has a title in its back catalogue that can be seen as a pivotal point in its evolution and growth. Valve has *Half Life*, id Software has *Doom,* and Square has *Final Fantasy*; these games provided the momentum that has propelled such esteemed companies to global stardom, and without these significant successes, it's highly plausible that such famous code houses might not even exist today. UK-based Rare is no exception to this rule. While the firm wasn't in any danger of falling into obscurity during the early Nineties, it's hard to imagine that it would have become quite as big as it is today without the propulsion provided by the 1994 SNES smash-hit *Donkey Kong Country*.

Today, Rare is a wholly owned subsidiary of Microsoft Game Studios and operates out of a purpose-built, high-tech HQ in the idyllic Leicestershire countryside, but prior to reviving the *Donkey Kong* brand, it was based in the rather less-modern surroundings of a Grade II listed farmhouse, just a few miles up the road from its current residence. Despite the lack of swanky offices, it was just as fascinating a place to work as legend might have you believe. "Rare was an amazing place back then," recalls Brendan Gunn, who was employed as a technical programmer on *Donkey Kong Country* and had previously worked on the NES classic *Captain Skyhawk*. "It was quite a small company with a real family feel. Games were created in a very organic way, not planned out in detail in advance. We were always free to just try out ideas. Whatever worked would stay, and if it didn't feel good, we just ripped it back out again. In those days, it was not uncommon for entire games to be shelved if they didn't show enough promise. I think this was key to keeping the quality high."

Following a string of commercial successes during the late Eighties and early Nineties, the Stampers faced an uncertain future – as did the industry in general. The next generation of systems had started to arrive in the form of the 3DO, Amiga CD32 and Philips CD-i, but owners of existing 16-bit consoles seemed curiously reticent to upgrade, thanks largely to the unproven nature of CD-ROM systems and the high cost of new hardware. Sensing that the current generation still had some life in it but simultaneously mindful of an exciting new era just around the corner, the Stampers began to invest heavily in new graphics tech with the ultimate aim of creating one of the most advanced code houses in the British Isles.

It was a risky strategy, which involved great expense and temporarily limited the development output of the studio, but it was one that ultimately paid off; encouraged by the work being undertaken in Twycross, publishing partner Nintendo decided it was time to invest in the firm and promptly purchased 49 per cent of the company. "Rare began experimenting with creating 3D-rendered characters with our expensive new Silicon Graphics computers," Gunn explains, likening the situation to a perfect storm of events. "Visitors from Nintendo were suitably impressed by what we were working on, and Rare became a second-party developer. Rare had already impressed Nintendo with some excellent games, several of which Nintendo had actually published themselves. The obvious potential of pre-rendered 3D graphics would have sealed the deal, especially as the SNES was nearing the end of its life, and Nintendo was a little

WHATEVER WORKED WOULD STAY, AND IF IT DIDN'T FEEL GOOD, WE JUST RIPPED IT BACK OUT AGAIN

behind the competition in developing the next generation of 3D-capable consoles."

NINTENDO'S EXECS WERE so taken with what Rare had achieved with its shiny-new Silicon Graphics workstations that it effectively opened up its vault of properties and allowed the British company to take its pick – within reason, of course. "At this point, the door was open for the Stampers to push for the use of some existing Nintendo IP," Gunn says. "Obviously, they wouldn't give us a treasured character like Mario, but Donkey Kong had been largely abandoned for some time, and this was a chance to give him a new burst of life." Indeed, save for a few cameo roles, the mighty Kong had been largely dormant for the best part of a decade; his last outing was 1983's *Donkey Kong 3*. Ironically, during 1994 another Kong game would hit the market in shape of the Game Boy title *Donkey Kong '94* (see "1994's Other Kong"), but it was more of a retooling of the 1981 original than an entirely new

1994'S OTHER KONG

With two Kongs around, 1994 marked the battle of the apes

WHILE RARE MANAGED to kick-start Kong's career with *Donkey Kong Country* and turn the massive, bumbling primate into a household name once again, it wasn't the only title he starred in during the bumper year of 1994. June (September in Europe) saw the launch of an all-new Donkey Kong adventure on the monochrome Game Boy system that is often referred to as *Donkey Kong '94*. Based loosely on the original 1981 arcade machine that started it all, it begins with the coin-op's first four levels, but quickly changes pace with 97 all-new stages that take the core gameplay seen in Kong's debut and turn it on its head with all manner of enhancements and improvements. Our hero Mario (who reverts back to his not-so-Super guise for this release) can swim, climb ropes and even catch incoming barrels, and there are boss fights to contend with as well. While the arcade game was a score-based venture, this portable outing is blessed with a battery back-up facility so that players can retain their progress. All things considered, *Donkey Kong '94* is a fantastic update to the coin-guzzling original and rightly received critical acclaim on its release; however, hitting the market in the same year as Rare's legendary title perhaps dented its chances of long-lasting fame, and it has been rather overshadowed in the years that have followed. Thankfully, it hasn't been totally forgotten and is currently available on the 3DS Virtual Console, where it is well-worth investigating. One final point of interest is that Kong is wearing a red tie in this title, an item of clothing that Rare would factor into its own interpretation of the famous character – an interpretation that, it should be pointed out, has become the accepted norm on this infamous character since the launch of *Donkey Kong Country*.

■ The variety showcased in the game's many levels put rival SNES titles to shame.

adventure, and its release did little to detract from Rare's grand vision.

Gunn's role on *Donkey Kong Country* was a technical one, and he had to come up with the code that would make everything sing. His contribution was an incredibly important one, but even so, he was unprepared for the first time that he laid eyes on Rare's fresh interpretation of gaming's most famous ape. "I was really amazed the first time I saw a 3D-rendered Donkey Kong model on screen," he recalls more than twenty years later. "It looked so different from traditional hand-drawn graphics, and far ahead of what consoles would be able to render in real-time for many years to come. It was very exciting and inspiring to work with these graphics. All my previous games had been solo projects in terms of programming, so *Donkey Kong Country* was different in that I could spend all of my time focused on the visuals, leaving the gameplay to Chris Sutherland. For me, that was a bigger difference than the pre-rendering. I was able to put a lot of time into really optimising the use of video RAM to get a lot of variation in the graphics. We didn't want it to look like there was a lot of repeated images on screen. I also spent a lot of time adding lots of layers of parallax in the backgrounds, and adding the day-to-night transitions and weather effects."

Those familiar with the geography of the English Midlands will be aware that Rare's HQ isn't the only thing that the small and rather sleepy village of Twycross is famous for – it also boasts an internationally renowned zoo, which houses the largest selection of monkeys and apes in the western hemisphere, making it the ideal research target for a game studio creating a title showcasing plenty of hairy primates. That's what you'd assume at least, but sadly the trip that occurred during the creation of *Donkey Kong Country* would prove to be a waste of effort. "I was not involved in the zoo visit, but I understand it was ultimately fruitless," Gunn smiles. "The animators tried making Donkey Kong move like a real ape, but it just didn't look right in the game and he finished up moving more like a galloping horse."

■■■ *DONKEY KONG COUNTRY* was designed from the ground up to be a ground-breaking visual spectacle, but like so many titles of the period, it took inspiration from one of the oldest SNES games: *Super Mario World*. Kong is able to jump onto the heads of enemies – just like Mario – and collects bananas instead of coins; he also traverses a massive overworld map and is able to move freely between stages using connected pathways – something that was popularised by the *Super Mario* series. To call this slavish cloning might be a little overzealous, but few would deny the fact that Rare's prestigious Nineties output benefited greatly from ideas generated by the Japanese company with which it shared a very intimate relationship. "Rare has made a lot of original games," starts Gunn, "But when it comes to working on familiar genres, we always looked to Nintendo for inspiration. Why not learn from the best? We always tried to put our own spin on things – not simply copying Nintendo's games – but they often found brilliant solutions to
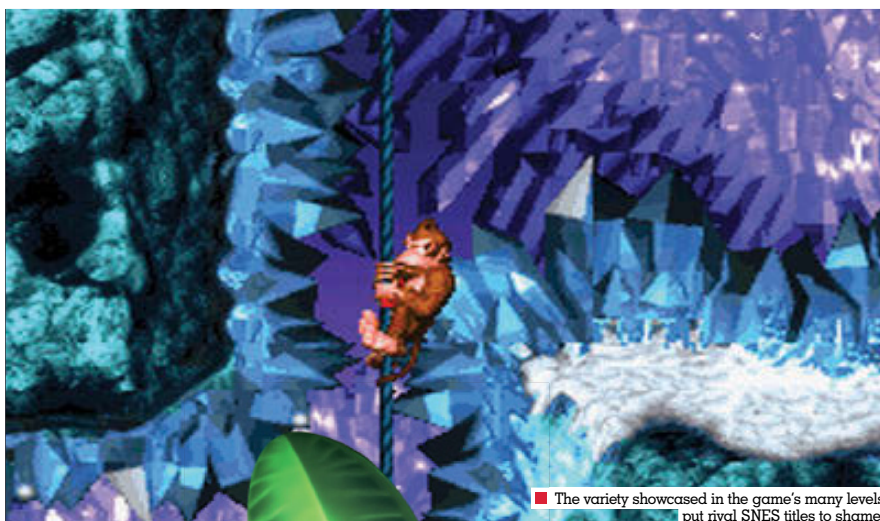
■ The map screens hold a hidden regret for Gunn, who wishes he'd spent more time on pathways.

WHAT THEY SAID…

With such a strong replay value, *Donkey Kong Country* is sure to be a colossal hit this holiday. If you want to hit an ape ball in the side pocket, you'll recognise *DKC* for what it is: the gorilla of your dreams
GamePro, 1994

common problems, so it would be foolish not to copy a few ideas."

That's not to say that the team designing the game didn't come up with a few unique notions of their own – one of these being the use of Post It notes to plan out level designs, which resulted in some particularly memorable stages. "We wanted a process that allowed us to visually build up the level plans and also allow fast iteration at the initial design stage," Gregg Mayles tells us. Mayles worked as the main designer on the game and is still employed at Rare today, making him one of the studio's longest-serving staffers. While creating level layouts on paper certainly isn't anything innovative in the games industry, Post Its permitted the designer to switch scenes and change the plan quickly and effortlessly, rather than having to redraw entire portions of the level. "Drawing things on bits of paper that could be shuffled around, reworked or replaced was ideal," continues Mayles – who, like Gunn, is a local lad and was born just a few miles from Rare's Twycross HQ. "Someone suggested these bits of paper could be Post It notes and it all went from there. It was a real revelation at the time and I still use Post Its at the heart of my design process today."

Given that Nintendo was bankrolling the creation of this new title – and that it used one of the company's most famous faces – you might assume that the Japanese veteran was quite hands-on with development. Gunn explains that even if such meetings took place – and only the Stampers really know the truth on the score – the team was kept well away from any distractions that could possibly impact the final product. "We had a great deal of creative freedom," Gunn enthuses. "As an individual, I felt free to try anything that could make the game look better, and as a company, I think Rare was allowed to make *Donkey Kong Country* very much our own product. Tim and Chris would always shield the team as much as possible from outside influences so we could focus

on making the games to the best of our abilities. I understand that in the early stages of development, Miyamoto was very keen to exert some control over the look of the Donkey Kong character, as Tim had pushed his design a long way from the original. The final look was a great compromise – and I'm pleased to see that Nintendo hasn't deviated very much since then." Indeed, Donkey Kong today sports a look that is based more on the SNES titles than his previous adventures – an admission by Nintendo that Rare created the most aesthetically pleasing iteration of the great ape.

■■■ THE STAMPERS HAVE since left Rare to pursue other projects – it was recently revealed that Tim has founded a smartphone game studio in Nottingham called FortuneFish with his son, Joe – but their impact on *Donkey Kong Country* cannot be understated. "They were a huge influence," says Gunn. "In particular I remember Tim was a great motivator as well as a very talented artist. He would spend a lot of time with me, always pushing me to take things to the next level. For example, just having it rain wasn't enough. It should rain way in the distance first, and then gradually bring it forwards until it's raining in all the layers of the screen." This graphical flourish is one aspect of the game that Gunn is particularly proud of. "My favourite bit is the combination of the weather effects and multi-layered parallaxing. I really enjoyed hearing other engineers trying to figure out how we crammed so much graphical variation in each level. Look at *Super Mario World* for comparison; its a lovely game, but I see so much obvious repetition in

DRAWING THINGS ON BITS OF PAPER THAT COULD BE SHUFFLED AROUND WAS IDEAL

the graphics."

Speaking of Mario, it was reported at the time of development that Shigeru Miyamoto was less than impressed with Rare's efforts, allegedly bemoaning the fact that gamers of the time were dazzled by visuals and not gameplay. Miyamoto himself has publicly refuted this stance in recent years – stating quite correctly that as Kong's daddy, he was intimately involved with the production of the title – but could the graphically stunning *Donkey Kong Country* have caused the famous designer to feel a little jealous, given that he was working on the more visually simplistic *Super Mario World 2: Yoshi's Island* at the time? "I only really know what's been reported on the internet, and we all know that's the best place in

Rideable allies was another aspect that was borrowed from *Super Mario World*.

Barrels were put to good use in the game, offering everything from a friendly ape to rocket propulsion.

Even after being sold to Microsoft, Rare would port *Donkey Kong Country* – and its sequels – to the Game Boy Advance.

WHAT THEY SAID...

Who needs 32 or even 64-bit when Nintendo can keep pulling marvels out of the 16-bit hat? *Donkey Kong Country* is simply mind-blowing

EGM, 1994

the world for finding opinion rather than fact," laughs Gunn when asked about Miyamoto's comments. "I know Miyamoto was passionate about the game during development, and so were the people at Rare, but that doesn't mean we all wanted the same things. Japanese games have some very distinct differences from games in the west, and the brilliant Shigeru Miyamoto has been a big part of the Japanese style. I'm sure he would have made the game very differently, but I'm confident that he must also appreciate some of the qualities that made it stand out from his own games."

Deadlines in videogame development are so often dictated by the purchasing habits of players, and Rare was working to a strict schedule with *Donkey Kong Country* – the game had to hit store shelves during the lucrative holiday season in North America. Gunn admits that the team was able to fulfil its objectives in time for launch, but even so, there are things he would like to have spent more time on. "No project ever really feels complete," he says. "I could always go back and keep improving things, but at some point you just have to draw a line under it and let it out into the world. Having said that, the only thing I'm really unhappy about in *Donkey Kong Country* is in the map pages. We have these beautifully rendered map screens with winding paths linking each area of the game, and I just did a lazy straight line path for Donkey Kong to walk along instead of accurately following the path. I'm a little embarrassed by that."

THANKFULLY THE GENERAL public didn't seem to pay any notice to the lack of winding pathways, and *Donkey Kong Country* became a runaway hit, shifting almost 10 million copies worldwide and effectively delaying the onset of the next-generation revolution; the game assured SNES owners that there was little sense in dropping an insane amount of cash

on a 3DO or Jaguar when their current console was capable of producing such amazing visuals. Two SNES-based sequels would follow, and Gunn worked on both – yet he freely admits that he doesn't hold the same level of affection for them as the trailblazing original. "I worked on both of the SNES sequels, as well as *Donkey Kong 64*," he recounts. "Again for the SNES sequels, I was focused on the graphics, and

I KNOW MIYAMOTO WAS PASSIONATE ABOUT THE GAME DURING DEVELOPMENT

I continued to refine some of the techniques I'd used in the original. I was particularly pleased with the 3D effect inside the flooded ship – I can't even remember whether that was *Donkey Kong Country 2* or *Donkey Kong Country 3*. The dripping honey effect in *Donkey Kong Country 2* was quite satisfying, too. Although the sequels were more polished in a number of ways, I don't look back on them with the same fondness as the original. I just don't really like retreading old ground."

Nevertheless, Gunn's involvement with the *Donkey Kong Country* series would have a dramatic impact on his life thanks to the bonus scheme that Rare operated during his tenure with the company, which ensured that staff benefited from their hard work should their games turn out to be big sellers. Is it fair to say that these releases changed his life? "*Donkey Kong Country* and its sequels were pretty lucrative,

> A GAMING EVOLUTION
Super Mario World > DK Country > Clockwork Knight

Shigeru Miyamoto's seminal 16-bit smash hit was a massive influence on practically every 2D platformer.

Sega's *Saturn*-based 2D platform epic took the 3D rendered visuals of *Donkey Kong Country* to the next level.

but 'life-changing' is perhaps a little strong," he replies with a chuckle. "I'd definitely say 'life-enhancing'!" Gunn now works outside of the games industry with a design firm in Ashby-de-la-Zouch – a small town just minutes away from Rare's Twycross HQ and the place where Tim and Chris Stamper originally founded the company back in Eighties, under the moniker Ashby Computers & Graphics – and remains very proud of the things he achieved during his time with the studio. "It was great working with so many talented people over so many years, but for me *Donkey Kong Country* was the pinnacle. The best part was working with such an amazing team."

■ Rare created an entire Kong family for the game, including the memorable Cranky Kong.

CONTINUATION OF KONG
The line of Nintendo's infamous ape didn't end with Rare

When Microsoft purchased Rare it drew a line under the studio's involvement with the Donkey Kong character it had done so much to revitalise. However, it thankfully didn't mean the end of the *Donkey Kong Country* series, as in 2010 Nintendo enlisted Texas-based Retro Studios to create *Donkey Kong Country Returns* for the Wii. It was a critical and commercial success and managed to capture much of the magic of the originals – a remarkable achievement when you consider that Rare wasn't involved in its production. The game would be ported to the Nintendo 3DS in 2012 by Monster Games, and Retro would return to the series in 2014 with *Donkey Kong Country: Tropical Freeze* on the Wii U.

■ During the game's memorable intro, Kong performs his own dance routine before being caught in a CGI explosion.

SUPER METROID
SNES [Nintendo] 1994

■ FOR A company known for its outwardly family friendly appearance, Nintendo has a penchant for incorporating disturbing imagery into some of its most beloved properties. Mario suffocating underwater in his Nintendo 64 debut or Ganondorf's brutal execution in *The Legend Of Zelda: Wind Waker*. But when you're talking about true unflinching horror, then leave it to the *Metroid* franchise to uncover the dark heart throbbing beneath Nintendo's saccharine veneer. Enter Crocomire, a boss in *Super Metroid* that's notable for both the manner in which it is defeated and the terrifying nature of its demise. After Samus successfully powers Crocomire into a retreat, the beast falls into a river of molten lava, the flames burning the flesh from its bones as it howls in agony. Its cadaverous reappearance further cements the encounter as pure nightmare fuel and represents Nintendo at its most macabre.

SUPER MARIO WORLD 2: YOSHI'S ISLAND
SNES [Nintendo] 1995

■ Baby Bowser hasn't quite reached megalomaniac status when Yoshi stumbles into his playroom at the end of *Super Mario World 2: Yoshi's World*. This spoilt brat demands to ride the "green donkey" and throwing a right temper strop when Yoshi fails to oblige. It's after a few precision ground pounds from Mario's loyal steed that the infant is knocked on his rump bawling, only for Kamek to appear and cast a spell that transforms Prince Koopa into gigantic proportions. With the castle flattened, Bowser creeps towards Yoshi until he engulfs the entire screen, spitting fireballs and sending debris tumbling down to destroy the ground. Even as a child Bowser proved his nuisance value and an eternal rivalry was born.

Chrono Trigger features over a dozen possible endings. Some revel in your success or failure through the main story, while some are just plain weird.

GAME CHANGERS

CHRONO TRIGGER

Released: 11 March 1995 **Publisher:** In-house **Developer:** Square **System:** SNES

Created by gaming's first development supergroup, this RPG from Square would come to be one of the most influential and expressive games ever released

THE INDUSTRY HAS changed a lot in the last 20 years. Gaming has grown up, the hardware has evolved and the technology driving play has given us incredibly cinematic experiences – though none of these achievements are a substitute for real quality or raw ambition. Back in 1995, for Nintendo's SNES, Square assembled what can only be described as a 'dream team' of developers; a group of RPG aficionados that would come together to create one of the most ambitious and influential games of the modern era, one that stands (arguably) uncontested even to this day.

Chrono Trigger's supergroup team consisted of three core members: the creator of *Final Fantasy*, Hironobu Sakaguchi; the creator of *Dragon Quest*, Yuji Horii; and creator of *Dragon Ball*, Akira Toriyama. That trio was then joined by legendary *Final Fantasy* designers Takashi Tokita, Yoshinori Kitase and Akihiko Matsui, as well as respected composers Yasunori Mitsuda and Nobuo Uematsu. You couldn't ask for a better team, and so perhaps it should come as no real surprise that *Chrono Trigger* so effortlessly stood the test of time – the extent of its influence impossible to gauge in any real tangible sense.

The group conceived one of the most complex narratives and technologically advanced games of the era, its ambition matched only by its various successes. On the surface it doesn't seem wholly original – even for the RPG genre. You've got your silent protagonist, your world-ending catastrophe looming over a near horizon and a large array of lovable characters to internally debate between as you look to build a perfect squad of unlikely heroes. But it's the

BEST BOSS
THE TOUGHEST FIGHTS YOU'LL FIND IN CHRONO TRIGGER

LAVOS

★ You'll encounter Lavos twice in *Chrono Trigger*, though your battle with the big bad is more challenging the first time around. The Ocean Palace fight is still a nightmare, with Lavos exhibiting stronger and faster attacks, with three times as much as its usual HP.

GIGA GAIA

★ Found at the peak of the Mountain Of Woe (because where else), Giga Gaia is an elemental creature that'll destroy any team that hasn't taken the time to stock up on shadow and fire elemental protection; 12000 BC has never been so deadly or stressful.

THE GOLEM SISTERS

★ The twin Golem fight represents one of those occasions where you'll be kicked in the teeth over and over again if you have not ground out enough XP. This is the battle most players usually realise that they are woefully underpowered, it's a total nightmare.

way in which *Chrono Trigger* brought together all of its elements that's truly impressive, even to this day.

The story is cast across time, with the group of adventurers travelling between 65 million BC to 2300 AD to try to stop a global catastrophe. You'll be shifting between the prehistoric age, the Middle Ages and a post-apocalyptic future – each area giving you the opportunity to watch the world and landmarks warp under the demands of time itself. It's this twisting narrative that gave way to one of *Chrono Trigger*'s most famous elements, an adventure that would culminate in one of 13 endings depending on how you fared against apocalyptic-demon king, Lavos.

■ ■ ■ But at the time is wasn't the depth of the story that drew praise, but the characters themselves – something many modern RPGs seem to have fallen out of touch with. Considering the technology Square was working with at the time, such fluid character development was unheard of. Everybody on the roster had dreams to realise and

SQUARE ASSEMBLED A 'DREAM TEAM' OF DEVELOPERS THAT WOULD CREATE ONE OF THE MOST AMBITIOUS AND INFLUENTIAL GAMES OF THE MODERN ERA

KEY FACTS

■ Back in the Nineties, the original SNES version of the game went out of print making it a highly coveted collectors item. Thankfully, *Chrono Trigger* is now readily available via the PlayStation Store, Nintendo's Virtual Console and on the Nintendo DS.

■ *Chrono Trigger*'s battle system is a variation of the Active Time Battle System that was famously used in the early *Final Fantasy* games, debuting in *Final Fantasy IV* in 1991, but was then adapted to allow for more depth in this new adventure.

personal demons holding them back from finding their true potential. You can work with, and build relationships with, each and every one of them; the game doesn't penalise you for choosing certain team compositions, instead it rewards you by furthering your understanding of their motivations. These heroes are some of the richest characters to grace the RPG, it only helped to strengthen the narrative and set a new benchmark for genre games to strive towards.

Still, for all of *Chrono Trigger*'s success with character and narrative, it was Square's delivery on superb gameplay that ensures it stands the test of time. The SNES gave us many beloved games, but not many could match *Chrono Trigger* in terms of visual flair and impeccable flow. Battles took place out in the field map (as opposed to random encounters) and the natural, near-seamless transition between exploration to battle encounters helped imbue *Chrono Trigger* with an immediacy that it has never lost. We mentioned before that you could choose custom team compositions, which also brings a new tactical edge to combat – several combos of double and triple attacks (Techs) are discovered through specific character pairings, there's still plenty to discover after your first play through.

And to think, this was all pulled off on the SNES. A fantastic console for sure, but ultimately it has a limited processing power, not that it stopped the dream team from delivering on almost every area. Considering the scope of the narrative, the depth of the battle system and the wonderful character development, you'd think *Chrono Trigger* would have to cut corners somewhere, right? That wasn't the case, with it also impressing with beautiful sprites, gorgeous backdrops, enemy animations through battles and one of the best scores ever committed to a videogame. *Chrono Trigger* didn't just change the way we think about RPGs, it also proved that it doesn't matter what technology developers have access to – ultimately it's the talent on a project, not the tools, that make a masterpiece.
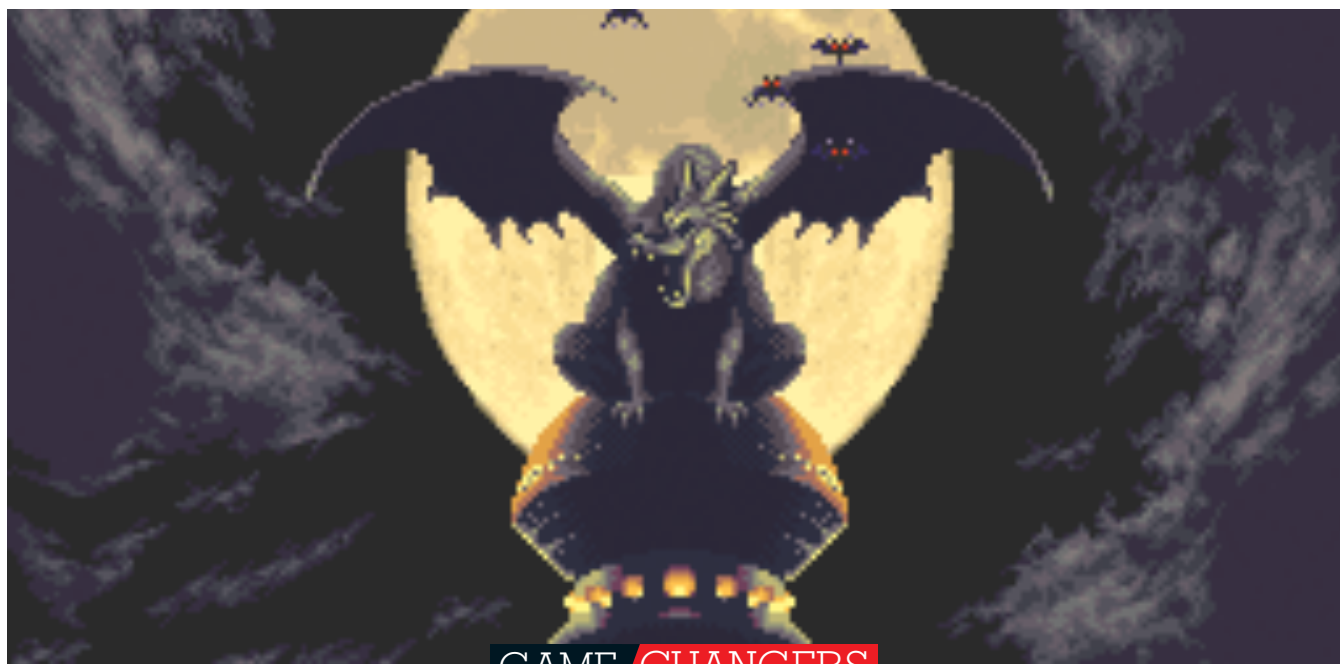
GAME CHANGERS

DETAILING THE DREAM TEAM

BEHIND CHRONO TRIGGER WAS A TEAM OF SOME OF THE BEST AND BRIGHTEST IN THE JAPANESE DEVELOPMENT COMMUNITY, THESE ARE THE GAMES THEY HAVE PLAYED A PART IN CREATING

HIRONOBU SAKAGUCHI

■ Hironobu Sakaguchi, the producer and creator of the Final Fantasy series, conceived *Chrono Trigger* back in 1992. He served as director over the first five entries of the Final Fantasy series, helping to establish many of the RPG systems and mechanics that are still used to this day. His last major release was Mistwalker's *Lost Odyssey* for Xbox 360 in 2007.

AKIRA TORIYAMA

■ Potentially the most famous of the development team behind *Chrono Trigger*, Toriyama is best known as the creator of anime *Dr. Slump* and *Dragon Ball*. Toriyama was brought in during the early stages of development to design the characters and settings; he would later team up with Sakaguchi a decade later to design characters for *Blue Dragon*.

YUJI HORII

■ Yuji Horii is the creator of the Dragon Quest series – once the biggest competitor to Final Fantasy – though that didn't stop him from teaming up with his RPG rival Sakaguchi for *Chrono Trigger*. Horii would write scenarios and supervise *Chrono Trigger*'s writing teams before returning to work on Dragon Quest, for which he still serves as general director.

KAZUHIKO AOKI

■ Once the core trio had been assembled and began trying to figure out how to make *Chrono Trigger* a reality, Kazuhiko Aoki offered his services as a producer and the project began moving forward. Aoki worked largely behind the scenes as a battle designer on early Final Fantasy projects, including *IV* and *V*. His activity has subsided somewhat in recent years.

MASATO KATO

■ Scenario writer Masato Kato was brought in alongside 60 other developers to brainstorm initial ideas, and was later appointed as the story planner. While he originally vetoed the idea of a time-travel themed game, he was convinced of the idea by supervisor Horii. Kato would go on to direct a sequel, the 1999 PlayStation exclusive, *Chrono Cross*.

AKIHIKO MATSUI

■ Brought in as a battle designer and planner for *Final Fantasy IV* and *V*, Akihiko Matsui would bring his expertise to the RPG, becoming responsible for getting enemy sprites moving in battles, a huge accomplishment at the time. Matsui would then lead the combat system design teams for *Final Fantasy XI* and *XIV: A Realm Reborn*.

YOSHINORI KITASE

■ A name many Final Fantasy fans will be familiar with, Yoshinori Kitase caught a break on *Chrono Trigger* after serving as a director on *Final Fantasy VI* the previous year. Kitase was largely responsible for writing the various sub-plots that surrounded the multiple endings. Kitase would go on to direct *Final Fantasy VII, VIII, X* and produce the *XIII* trilogy.

TAKASHI TOKITA

■ Though he is now the head of Square Enix's Business Division 9, *Chrono Trigger* would be Tokita's directorial debut. He was responsible for writing sub-plots, and oversaw much of the development with graphic designer Tetsuya Takahashi. He may be credited with a 'special thanks' these days, but his influence on *Chrono Trigger* can't be overlooked.

GAME CHANGERS

Super Mario 64

Released: 1996
Publisher: Nintendo
Developer: Nintendo
System: N64

gamesTM examines the industry's most important videogames, looking at their influence and what made them so great. This month we kick things off with Super Mario 64, the most important 3D platformer of all time

EARLY GAMES OFTEN struggled when they made the jump from 2D to 3D. Franchises that had been so fun to play in 2D suddenly lost part of their charm. When Mario made his debut on the N64, however, he suffered from no such problems. In fact, it's safe to say that his exciting arrival shaped the genre for years to come, while proving that classic franchises could make the supposedly difficult transition to 3D.

And Nintendo certainly knew what it was doing when it unleashed Mario in his new 64-bit playground, giving him a slew of new abilities that allowed him to interact with the game world in new and exciting ways. Creator Shigeru Miyamoto had built *Super Mario 64* specifically around the N64's controller, and the result offered a natural play experience that effortlessly highlighted Mario's many new abilities. The revitalised plumber could scramble up trees and somersault off them, crouch to get into small nooks and crannies, shimmy along narrow passageways, gingerly tip-toe past sleeping enemies, punch foes

THE BEST TRANSITION FROM 2D TO 3D IN RECENT GAMING MEMORY

BEFORE SUPER MARIO 64

I, Robot
Released: **1983**

■ Although not strictly a platformer, this was the first arcade game to use filled 3D polygons to create an imaginative game world. Dave Theurer's creation was a financial flop, but has since gone on to receive cult status.

3D Ant Attack
Released: **1983**

■ This isometric adventure from Sandy White had you searching the ruined city of Antescher for your sweetheart, while avoiding deadly ants. Amazingly innovative for its time, it's largely responsible for the popularity of isometric 3D in home computers.

MAGIC MOMENTS

IT'S-A-ME, MARIO!

■ IT WAS IMPRESSIVE enough when your N64 booted up and you were greeted by the mesmerising face of Mario. It became even more impressive when you realised that you could use the N64's controller to contort his face into all sorts of crazy positions.

BOWSER BY THE TAIL

■ BOWSER FIGHTS HAVE always been memorable, but the power of the N64 allowed Miyamoto's team to show off. Grabbing the gigantic turtle by his tail and constantly spinning him, before throwing into the ether, elicits a wonderful sense of joy.

TAKING FLIGHT

■ *SUPER MARIO BROS 3* gave you a tantalising taste of flight, but even that couldn't prepare you for the sheer freedom you felt upon discovering the Wing Cap in *Super Mario 64*. A fantastic moment that still feels immensely satisfying.

that got too close to him, deliver a devastating new bottom bounce, and pull off long jumps, triple jumps and backflips with ease. He was incredibly athletic despite his rotund appearance, but his new skills weren't just to show off the power of Nintendo's new console. Mario's many new skills represented a smorgasbord of choices for the player, allowing him or her to approach Mario's levels in ways that just hadn't been possible in previous platformers.

Super Mario 64's level design was absolutely exemplary. Princess Peach's castle served as a huge hub, with its many rooms allowing Mario to be transported to exciting new game worlds called courses. Admittedly, many of the courses on offer were the staple diet of past platformers – a generic-looking ice world here, an obvious desert world there – but never had they been realised so fully in a game before Nintendo's magnificent release.

UNLIKE PREVIOUS *MARIO* games that presented game worlds split across a set number of levels, the courses of *Super Mario 64* consisted of just one, beautifully designed stage. Each stage was filled with missions that ranged from collecting a set number of red coins to retrieving sunken treasure, racing penguins or facing off against a selection of mini-bosses. Once a mission had been completed Mario would be rewarded with a star. The real beauty of this approach was that the player was allowed to make their own choices throughout each stage, and while each mission was presented to the player in a specific order, it was possible to complete them out of sequence by simply being curious about the

game world. This is *Super Mario 64*'s biggest strength because it's constantly challenging the player. Sure you might see a star within tantalising reach, but first you must consider what skills in your considerable repertoire will allow you to acquire it.

This same approach applies to the way Mario accessed new worlds as well. Virtually every door in Peach's castle had a number on it, which could only be opened once Mario had collected a specific number of stars. Again these doors can be opened in any order (providing you have the set number of stars), building on the multi-path approach that earlier Mario games took. Although *Super Mario 64*'s worlds are fairly generic in their approach, their design is beautiful, with the clean, simple textures still impressing today. As the game progressed, however, the visuals became more elaborate and imaginative, with courses like Tiny-Huge Island and Tick Tock Clock really allowing the developers to run riot. Miyamoto had originally planned over 40 courses but memory issues meant that many were dropped, leaving the player with 15 main courses.

Return to *Super Mario 64* today and its influence can be see in virtually every game you care to look at. Rockstar's Sam Houser once revealed in an interview with *The New York Times* that "Anyone who makes 3D games who says they've not borrowed something from *Mario* or *Zelda* is lying, from the games on Nintendo 64, not necessarily the ones from today". After getting lost in Mario's enchanting world all over again and witnessing the magical touch of Miyamoto in action, we're inclined to agree.

The platformers that were dominant before Super Mario 64 came along

Alpha Waves
Released: **1990**
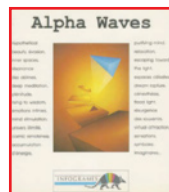
■ This experimental game was released on the Atari ST, before being ported to the Amiga and PC. It arrived a full six years before *Super Mario 64* and combines exploration with platform-styled gameplay.

Jumping Flash!
Released: **1995**

■ This inventive effort from Exact Co drew great acclaim in the early days of the PlayStation, as there was nothing quite like it on the system. Unlike *Super Mario 64* it utilises a first-person perspective and is a far more arcade-like experience.

Bug!
Released: **1995**

■ *Bug!* was one of the Saturn's earliest platformers, with the annoyingly voiced insect filling in for Sonic, who was absent at launch. It uses clever graphic techniques to create the illusion of 3D, but is otherwise a conventional platformer.

KEY FACTS

■ A 3D *Super Mario* using the FX chip was allegedly in development for the SNES, but Dylan Cuthbert recently debunked this rumour.

■ *Super Mario 64* sold incredibly well for Nintendo, shifting over 11 million units. It's unclear how many of these were based on the N64's pack-in promotion.

■ In addition to being built around the N64's controller, Shigeru Miyamoto and his team also built *Super Mario 64* around its camera and characters.

■ *Mario 64* didn't just influence platformers; Rare's Martin Hollis revealed that *GoldenEye*'s mission structure was borrowed from it too.

SUPER MARIO GALAXY
Released: **2007**

■ THE WII'S first 3D *Mario* upped the ante for the franchise and the genre in general by introducing all sorts of clever play mechanics. Gravity-based levels were the most obvious, but new power-ups like the Bee and Spring suit also took the gameplay in a fresh direction.
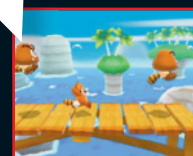
SUPER MARIO GALAXY 2
Released: **2010**

■ SOMEHOW THIS superb sequel managed to improve on virtually every aspect of its incredible predecessor. Levels design was exemplary, the introduction of Yoshi offered new gameplay options, while the level structure and approach feels more like *Super Mario 64.*
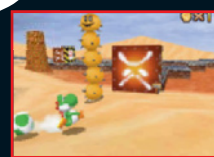
SUPER MARIO 3D LAND
Released: **2011**

■ GREAT THINGS were expect from the first 3DS *Mario* game and developers Nintendo EAD Tokyo did not disappoint. Ably assisted by Brownie Brown and DigitalScape, the focus was to make a 3D *Mario* game that played like a 2D one, which was effortlessly achieved.

SUPER MARIO 64 DS
Released: **2004**

■ THIS LAUNCH title for the DS featured a number of notable enhancements, making it worthy of inclusion here. In addition to letting you play as Luigi, Wario and Yoshi, it also introduced a host of excellent mini-games built around the DS's controls.
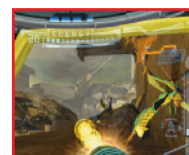
SUPER MARIO SUNSHINE
Released: **2002**

■ WHILE THE GameCube's first *Mario* title introduced an occasionally wonky camera, it also saw the debut of FLUDD. The Flash Liquidizing Ultra Dousing Device was an excellent item that helped Mario defeat bosses and tackle obstacles.
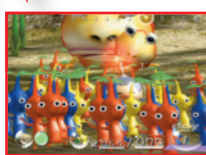
THE SEQUELS

WH HAPP NE

METROID PRIME
Released: **2002**

■ WHILE THE core game was created by Retro Studios, Miyamoto had an important role in *Metroid Prime*'s development. Originally intended as a third-person shooter, Miyamoto consistently steered the direction of the game to something that was more his liking. The tough love was worth it, as it became **games™**'s first 10/10.

PIKMIN
Released: **2001**

■ MIYAMOTO HAS often based his games on his own personal experiences. While he's never visited another planet (as far as we know) he is a keen gardener. *Pikmin*'s inspiration comes from Miyamoto's love of gardening and it morphed into an intriguing strategy game with interesting game mechanics.

WHAT SHIGERU MIYAMOTO DID NEXT

NINTENDOGS
Released: **2005**

■ ORIGINALLY BEGINNING life as a GameCube demo, *Nintendogs* came about when Miyamoto bought a dog for his family. It turned into one of the DS's most popular games, well received by both critics and gamers alike, and eventually going on to sell over six million units. A sequel with added cats launched on the 3DS in 2011.
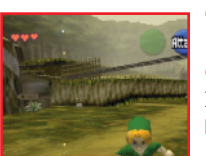
THE LEGEND OF ZELDA: OCARINA OF TIME
Released: **1998**

■ MIYAMOTO SHARED directing duties with Yochi Yamada, Yoshiaki Koizumi and Eiji Aonuma on *Ocarina Of Time*. The end result was a fantastic addition to the *Zelda* series that, like *Super Mario 64* before it, effortlessly crossed the two dimensional boundary into 3D.

STARFOX 64
Released: **1997**

■ THIS WAS an incredible sequel to the SNES game that offered operatic space battles, a new multiplayer mode and the new 'All-Range Mode', which removed the on-rails gameplay for certain parts of the game. Miyamoto worked in a producing role on this title, but his touch throughout is obvious.

AT ENED XT

Super Mario 64 was a revolutionary platformer that changed the genre. Here we look at its impact on the industry, examining its sequels, the many games it inspired and what its talented creator did next

THE KEY 3D PLATFORMERS THAT FOLLOWED

SKYLANDERS: SPYRO'S ADVENTURE
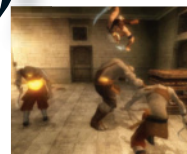Released: **2011**
■ *SPYRO* WAS first released as a conventional platformer in 1998, but the franchise was rebooted with phenomenal success in 2011. Now known as *Skylanders*, it featured unique toys that would come to life onscreen when placed on the Portal Of Power.
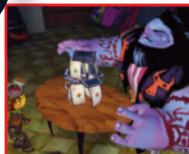
PSYCHONAUTS
Released: **2005**
■ TIM SCHAFER has gone on record to say that *Super Mario 64* influenced his quirky 2005 release. Boosted by a magnificent story and genuinely interesting characters, it's an interesting addition to the platformer that has all the usual quirkiness you'd expect from a Double Fine game.

PRINCE OF PERSIA: THE SANDS OF TIME
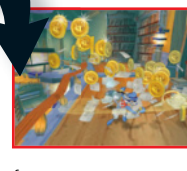Released: **2003**
■ JORDAN MECHNER returned to his critically acclaimed Apple II game, reinvigorating both the genre and the franchise with the excellent *Sands Of Time*. It's as much a puzzler as a platformer, with the player having to work out the best route.

JAK & DAXTER: THE PRECURSOR LEGACY
Released: **2001**
■ WHILE MANY aspects of the gameplay were fairly conventional, it featured impressive behind the scenes work, delivering a seamless world free of mid-game loads, a complete lack of fogging and impressive high resolution textures.

SLY COOPER AND THE THIEVIUS RACCOONUS
Released: **2002**
■ THIS CLEVER platformer features an entertaining cast of cuddly heroes, clever level design and some imaginative boss fights. Like *Rayman*, the gameplay is fairly conventional, but its rich world and fun characters make it well worth returning to.
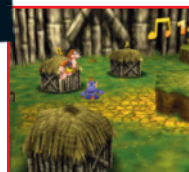
BANJO-KAZOOIE
Released: **1998**
■ RARE'S OWN love letter to *Super Mario 64* also helped take the platformer in new and exciting directions. It featured the same mission-structured base of *Super Mario 64*, but included two main characters who could interact with each other in a number of interesting ways to slowly unlock the huge game world.
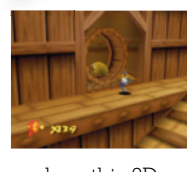
EARTHWORM JIM
3D Released: **1999**
■ SHINY ENTERTAINMENT unfortunately felt ill-equipped to work on this 3D sequel, so development was handed over to VIS Entertainment. The end result was sadly a plodding and laborious platformer, which, while it could be funny in places, just couldn't compare favourably to Jim's 2D original adventures.
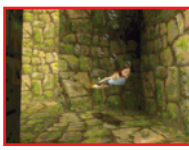
TOMB RAIDER
Released: **1996**
■ ALTHOUGH TECHNICALLY more rightly classified as an action/adventure game, there's more than enough platforming elements in Lara's first adventure to justify its inclusion here. It lacks *Mario*'s impressive 3D camera, but it nevertheless offers a fantastic sense of scale, particularly on later levels.

SONIC ADVENTURE
Released: **1998**
■ THERE WAS a lot riding on Sega's first proper 3D *Sonic* platformer, and *Sonic Adventure* didn't really disappoint. The action stages easily captured the essence of the massively successful 2D games. It was later rereleased on GameCube, Xbox 360 and PS3.
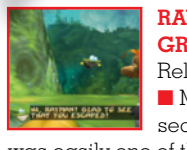
RAYMAN 2: THE GREAT ESCAPE
Released: **1999**
■ MICHEL ANCEL'S second *Rayman* game was easily one of the most impressive 3D platformers around and a huge improvement over his original game, being immensely playable. While the gameplay is fairly linear compared to the approach of *Super Mario 64*, it's full of neat little touches and plenty of sly humour.

GAME CHANGERS

POKÉMON RED/ BLUE/YELLOW

Released: 1996 (Japan), 1998 (US), 1999 (UK) **Publisher:** Nintendo
Developer: Game Freak **System:** Game Boy

Red Version

Pokémon created a new generation of role-playing fans with the most brilliantly simple of youth-friendly ideas: collecting and swapping…

MANY OF THE kids who picked up *Pokémon* had probably never heard of an RPG before. When *Red* and *Blue* arrived in 1999, the franchise had already blown up in the UK since the game released a year earlier in the US, with interest ballooning in the awful animated cartoon, the frankly odd-looking pocket monsters themselves and later the accompanying card game. It was a terrifyingly large craze that just happened to bring a somewhat niche genre to an enormous young audience, via some classically savvy Nintendo-branded game design.

This many years later, it's obvious that the game component of Pokémon had a kind of timeless merit, while other parts of the operation did not. The cartoon was far from impressive to look at, and could be painfully cheesy; the character designs only got progressively worse from Voltorb, Electrode and Ditto;

the card game isn't the force it once was. *Pokémon Red, Blue* and later *Yellow* marked, for the young generation of the late Nineties, their first experiences of an RPG and the trappings of its mechanics, channelled beautifully through a well-structured adventure that challenged players to catch and level up their own pocket monsters. Players were offered complete customisation of their battle line-up in a world populated with almost 150 creatures to catch. They were all out there, somewhere – and only determined exploration, as well as collaboration with your friends, would reveal them all.

The compulsive mentality it tapped into for kids was very much the same thing that leads them to complete football sticker albums, or – a more modern example – finding diamonds in *Minecraft*. It's that completionist attitude, married to the ingeniously unpredictable

HOW IT TOOK OVER THE EARTH | POKÉMON CONQUERED THE NINETIES AND BEYOND – THIS IS WHY IT HAPPENED


MULTIMEDIA

★ Trading cards, LCD Tamagotchi facsimiles, toys and the somewhat repetitive TV show; Pokémon is a pop culture megalodon that dominates multiple forms of media. The card game isn't as massive these days, but it was all over playgrounds in the late Nineties.
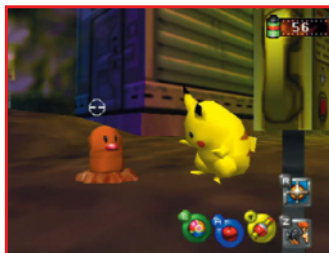
CONSOLE SPIN-OFFS

★ Pokémon's tendrils extended beyond the Game Boy, too, with amusing but thin N64 titles *Pokémon Snap* and *Stadium* finding significant success. A forgotten and reportedly rubbish curio, *Hey You Pikachu!*, allowed you to speak to the electric rodent.
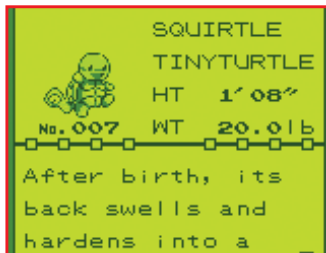
ICONOGRAPHY

★ We'd argue that Pokémon design has become uninspired in recent years, and even *Red* and *Blue* had the likes of Voltorb and Exeggcute to make the whole thing seem embarrassing. At the same time, many of the creatures were brilliantly designed.

CONSISTENCY

★ While the number bloated from 150 monsters to an exhausting 649 today, Pokémon has remained a very strong franchise. The task of catching them all is more intimidating than it used to be, but every generation has allowed the series to find new fans.

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process of catching Pokémon, that underlined the appeal of *Red* and *Blue*.

Yet it was the social interaction side of things that really altered industry thinking. *Pokémon Red* and *Blue* promoted use of the Game Boy's relatively obscure link cable as its founding conceit, that players would swap their Pokémon and battle with them using a pretty dusty old peripheral. The two different versions had 11 interchangeable monsters that could only be found on either *Red* or *Blue*, as well as four that could solely be obtained through trading with a fellow player; to complete your collection, *Pokémon* required you to interact with friends in order to get there, and many did. It opened up the potential of multiplayer experiences on handhelds in a way that we hadn't seen before.

■■■THERE WAS SOMETHING oddly powerful about the idea of sending a Pokémon that you'd raised over to a friend and receiving a new one in return. Pokémon, after all, is basically about the battles you fight and the creatures you fight them with – there was a sense of investment in that that's still entirely unique to this franchise.

But the other, more adrenaline-fuelled half of the link cable functionality was arguably the most exciting part of it all. The combat component to the multiplayer was essential, bridging two players'

POKÉMON BROUGHT A NICHE GENRE TO AN ENORMOUS YOUNG AUDIENCE

KEY FACTS

■ When you catch all 150 Pokémon, you're given a Game Freak diploma in Celadon City. Not that exciting, really. We'd at least want a key to the city from the mayor.

■ Pokémon actually began life as 'Capsule Monsters' in 1990, and was put on hold as the team at Game Freak worked on Yoshi. The first early design for Lapras existed then.

■ Combined, *Pokémon Red*, *Blue*, *Yellow* and *Green* (the Japanese original version of *Blue*) have sold over 30 million units in total. They still reign as the highest in the series.

massive adventures and adding some genuine personal stakes as you pit your two sets of monsters against each other. Players could strategise in these scraps, instead of contending with frequently silly AI that spams nothing attacks like Tail Whip and Growl in the midst of crucial battles. An entire worldwide phenomenon of competitions grew out of these two incredibly smart but simple uses of an old peripheral.

It could be argued that the series has become ruthlessly complicated in recent years, piling on more characters in a way that doesn't really add to the quality of the product, even as the realisation of the settings and creatures has become so much richer. Any kid who wants to catch 'em all these days needs a bottomless pit of time and overly generous parents to accumulate all the necessary titles – that seems counter to the binary simplicity of what *Red* and *Blue* originally represented. You and your friends, separately invested in your own adventures, collected Pokémon to your obsessive satisfaction. Then, on the most unlikely of formats, you brought your two adventures together to complete that experience. A deserved cultural phenomenon was born out of it.

The effect Pokémon had on the gaming landscape went far beyond the boundaries of its own success, however. Nintendo had stealthily introduced millions of players to the previously niche RPG genre, on an even bigger scale than *Final Fantasy VII* did in 1997, using its colourful setting and characters as a Trojan horse for what is undoubtedly fantastic and complex, stat-driven combat design. While visually speaking, *Pokémon Red*, *Blue* and *Yellow* were made to appeal to children, the actual meat of the experience was mature enough to give it a multi-generational appeal. *X & Y*'s release this year on 3DS only underlines that status – this franchise will live on forever, and rightfully so.

GAME CHANGERS

11 LESSONS WE'LL NEVER FORGET
FROM POKÉMON RED/BLUE

FROM THOSE HUNDREDS OF HOURS INVESTED IN POKÉMON IN THE LATE NINETIES, THESE ARE THE VITAL PIECES OF INFO THAT WILL LIVE WITH US FOREVER

1 BULBASAUR IS THE BEST STARTING POKEMON

■ ALTHOUGH SQUIRTLE IS a relatively close second place, Bulbasaur will blitz through early gym leaders Brock and Misty as soon as you have unlocked the Vine Whip skill. The evolutions into Ivysaur and Venusaur bring steadily more powerful abilities, too, underlining the fact that Bulbasaur makes the game a lot easier.
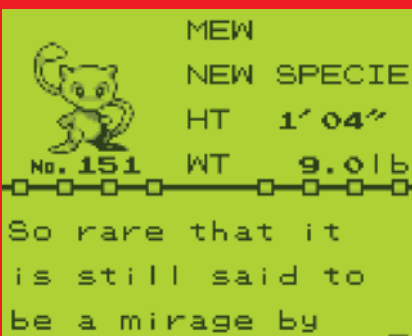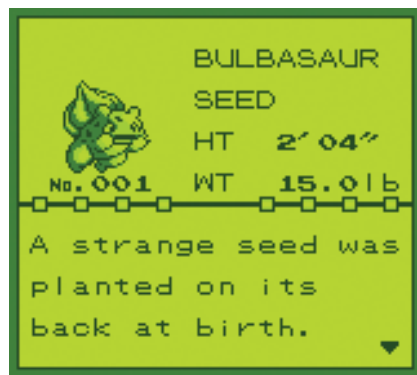
2 YOU CAN EASILY CATCH MEW BY USING A GLITCH

■ MEW BEING AN exclusive Nintendo giveaway was, let's face it, a bit of a slap in the face to the consumers who couldn't afford to attend such insanely specific events. It's comforting to know, then, that in 2003, a smart Pokémon player worked out that you could glitch the game using a specific trainer battle near Cerulean City to easily catch him.

3 CHARMANDER IS THE WORST STARTING POKEMON

■ CHARMANDER IS A poor choice of starting Pokémon, really, even if this tiny dragon features the best character design of the three starters, as it fails massively in the face of anti-fire gym leaders Brock and Misty. We've no doubt many players picked Charmander right away when they started the game – it makes that first half of the game a chore.
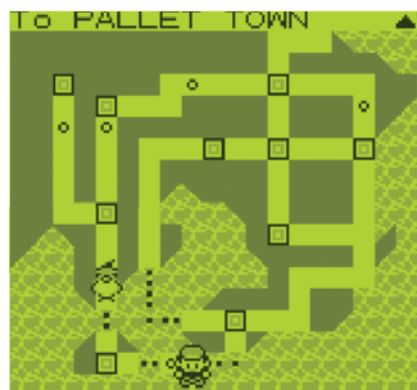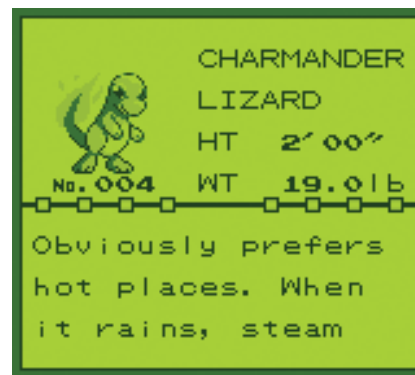
4 DON'T TEACH BAD HMS TO GOOD POKEMON

■ THE POKÉMON WE taught Flash to were borked forever, basically. And for what? A glorified version of Smokescreen that occupies an ability slot forever. Aside from Surf and *maybe* Fly, HMs (Hidden Machines) will quite simply spoil your veteran Pokémon by limiting their potential to learn the more effective TMs later in the game.

5 MISSINGNO IS THE WORTHIEST OF GLITCHES

■ ONE OF THE most popular videogame glitches of all time, Missingno is, for better or worse, a part of *Pokémon Red* and *Blue* that all players should seek out simply for the weirdness of fighting a living barcode that can give you multiple Master Balls. We will never forget how to do it. First, speak to the man in Viridian City…

PIKACHU
MOUSE
HT ?'??
No. 025   WT ???
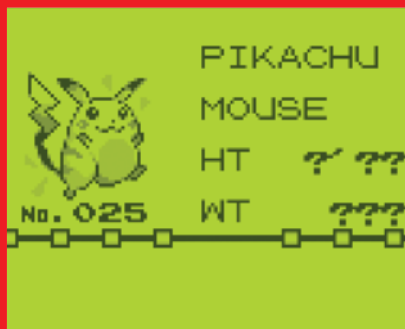
6 PIKACHU IS A REALLY PATHETIC FIGHTER

■ EVERY POKÉMON PLAYER in the land no doubt sought out the Pikachu early on in Viridian Forest, since the character was the face of the franchise, but creature's appalling defensive capabilities meant that Pikachu was a total waste of energy, aside from the far superior *Yellow* version 'Ash' one, which was yours from the start of the game.

7 POKÉMON YELLOW IS THE DEFINITIVE VERSION

■ IF YOU ENDURED the torrent of late Nineties Pokémon culture, *Yellow* is unmissable, dovetailing with the story of the television show in a more pronounced way, with Pikachu al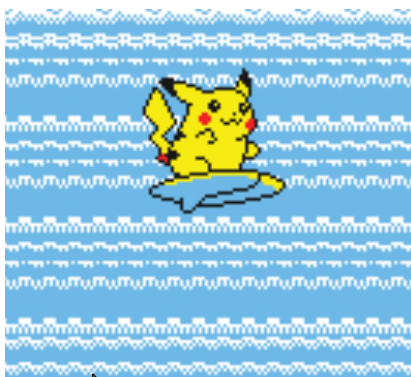ways by Ash's side and all three starter Pokémon (Bulbasaur, Charmander, and Squirtle) handed to you as part of the story. It also looked slightly better on the Game Boy Color.

SILPH CO.
OFFICE BUILDING

8 SILPH CO IS THE WORST BIT OF THE GAME

■ IT JUST GOES on for too long, and marks the least exciting part of the game. Team Rocket's Saffron City headquarters is like spending two hours stuck in a grey Eighties office block that marks the ultimate test of patience in *Pokémon Red*, *Blue* and *Yellow*. To be honest, we're surprised that the Pokémon craze didn't end there and then.

9 THE GAME BOY ADVANCE REMAKES ARE ESSENTIAL

■ *FIRERED* AND *LEAFGREEN* offers players the chance to play as a female character instead of the usual dorky lad, but it's the visual upgrade that heralded the biggest change, bringing all 151 Pokémon a contemporary polish that consumers were of course happy to buy into. It also brought a version of *Green* to the West for the first time.

All girls dream of traveling. It said so on TV.▼

10 THE LEGENDARY BIRDS/MEWTWO ARE THE BEST BITS

■ SEARCHING FOR THEM, finding them, catching them. These side quests feel like proper mini adventures, with each of Articuno, Zapdos and Moltres all residing in remote, vaguely creepy locations, adding a sense of wonder to an otherwise straightforward adventure, with Mewtwo also out there waiting to be found post-credits.

11 MR MIME WILL HAUNT US UNTIL OUR DYING DAY

■ KEN SUGIMORI, THE designer of every Pokémon in the original games, managed to unleash on the world a scarier creation than Jason Voorhees, Slenderman and combined. Mr. Mime (is there a Mrs. Mime? We really hope not) is fairly useful in battle as a buffer between fighters, but his design goes well beyond the traditional realms of terror.

MR.MIME
BARRIER
HT ?'??
No. 122   WT ???

BEST BOSS
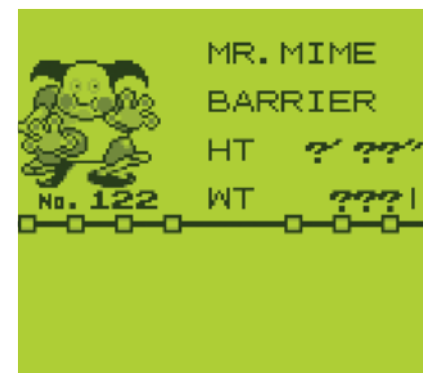
SUPER MARIO RPG: LEGEND OF THE SEVEN STARS SNES [SQUARE] 1996

■ Let's address the glaring inaccuracy first: Bundt isn't even a Bundt cake. While we're at it, he also appears to be alive, has a face and can fire a series of razor-like snowflakes. But more importantly, Bundt personifies the tone of Square's brief dalliance in the *Mario* canon: an idiosyncratic creation rich in humour that bridges the Nintendo's licensed characters with Square's design sensibilities. The boss battle itself is rather elementary. You fight against a pair of French chef stereotypes who slowly begin to realise that the cake they're protecting is moving, running away when it springs to life. Then you fight the three-tiered wedding cake until all that's left is its base sponge. While it's not the most challenging or technical encounter, the unusual, charismatic nature of the boss battle and Bundt's unique design make it one of the most memorable in the history of Mario adversaries.
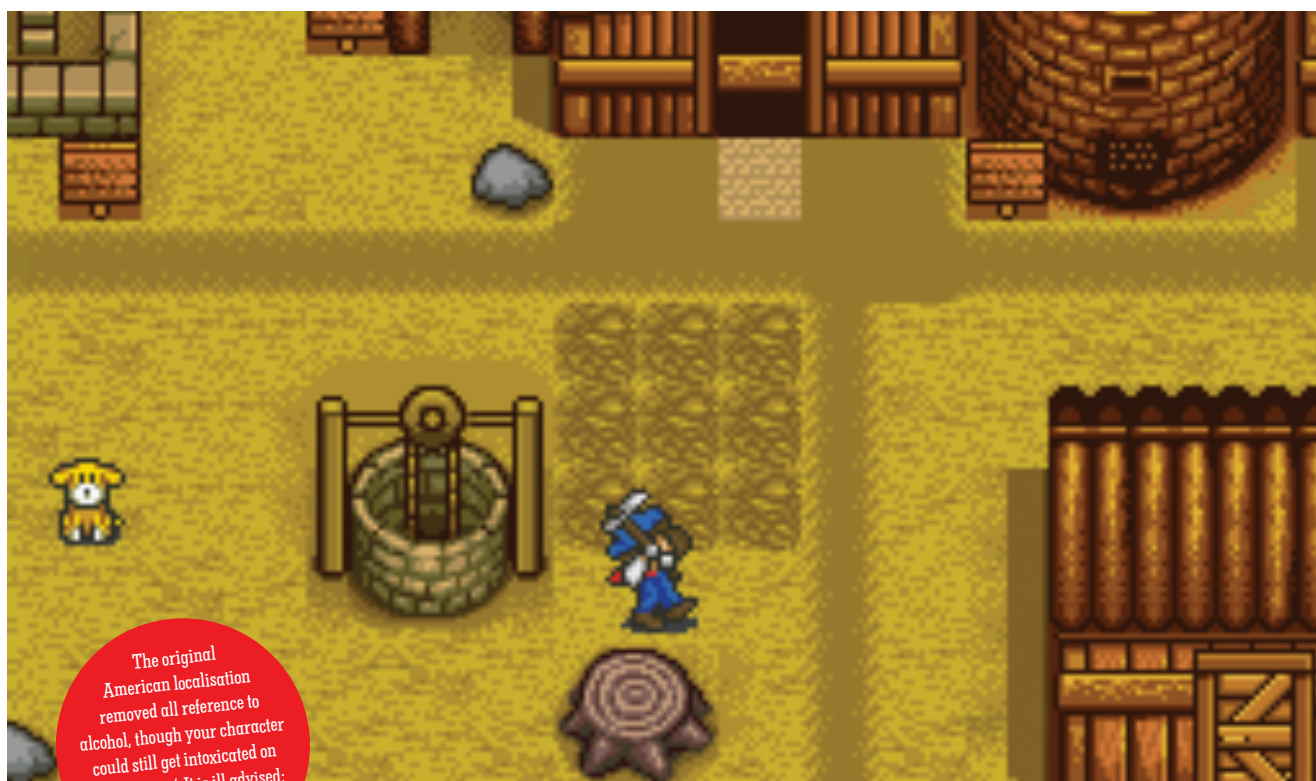
The original American localisation removed all reference to alcohol, though your character could still get intoxicated on special 'juice'. It is ill advised; nobody should farm with a hangover.

GAME CHANGERS

HARVEST MOON

Released: 9 August 1996 **Publisher:** Natsume **Developer:** Amccus **System:** SNES

Every month games™ looks back at some of the most influential and original games of all time. This month we dive into Harvest Moon, the game that made farming feel like play

BY THEIR VERY nature, videogames are an exercise in escapism. They sweep us away from the trauma of the nine-to-five and can deliver us to worlds unseen. They engage us in heroic fantasies and allow us to explore beyond the boundaries of space and time. A good game can present a brand of immersive freedom that is very difficult to derive from any other form of entertainment. And yet, here we are, forgoing sleep to till soil, watching the digital sun set on another hard day in the turnip fields.

There's something spectacular about the way in which *Harvest Moon* can turn even the most tedious acts into pleasurable activities. The SNES classic is still as enjoyable to this day as it was back in 1996; its accessibility and endearing 16-bit aesthetic have made it impossibly impervious to the destructive tendencies of time.

It's rare that a game from the days of retro-past can hold up so sublimely on something more than nostalgia value alone. *Harvest Moon* might not have been the first game to make play out of work, but it unearthed a recipe to success that helped establish it as one of the most prolific franchises in the industry.

On paper there's very little about a farming simulator that sounds appealing. By its nature, the gameplay is built around an approximation of real-world chores: sowing seeds, repairing fences, milking cows and harvesting crops. If that doesn't sound like a great use of your time, that's because it shouldn't be. But here we are, almost two decades later, still enthralled by it. *Harvest Moon* maintains a level of engagement that keeps the player involved, and it all begins with an irresponsible father figure.

TIPS AND TRICKS
LITTLE KNOWN SECRETS TO HELP IMPROVE PRODUCTIVITY

THE MONEY TREE

★ Don't listen to Hawker; money doesn't grow on trees. What 20,000G will get you, however, is a tree with a bell on it. It's a handy item that gets all of your animals inside automatically at night. It saves you so much time, and time is money in *Harvest Moon*.

DOG WATCHER

★ We understand that you want to keep your adorable dog inside the house with you, away from the elements. But if you leave it outside at night your fences will never break – unless it snows or rains, of course, as the dog will creep back inside the house.

WEATHER REPORT

★ Every morning you'll have the option of hearing a weather report. This is useful as it can change the plan of days. Rain negates hours spent watering plants, while storms could signal a need to leave animals inside; nobody likes seeing chickens get blown away.

■ ■ ■ After being abandoned at the family farm – the chicken coop, farmhouse and surrounding fields fallen into total disrepair – you're given just two and a half years to restore it to its former glory and (perhaps most importantly) prove yourself. Typically, your first few seasons will be rough as you attempt to get your head around the emerging systems without letting everything wither around you. But eventually *Harvest Moon* just clicks. You'll find yourself expertly budgeting resources, crops and time; working tirelessly to expand your farmland to survive the harsh winter and barren summer seasons.

You find your rhythm by pushing against its boundaries. You could try and stay up all night ripping weeds out of the ground if you wanted to, but you'll eventually become exhausted, putting the next day at risk as your stamina fails to recover – and you often discover this the hard way. Crop growth will stunt if you fail to water them daily, animals will stop producing the goods if you don't care for them and – if you're really unlucky – natural disasters such as hurricanes and earthquakes can set you back weeks.

> **IT'S RARE THAT A GAME FROM THE DAYS OF RETRO-PAST CAN HOLD UP SO SUBLIMELY ON SOMETHING MORE THAN NOSTALGIA VALUE ALONE**

KEY FACTS

■ There have been over 17 new *Harvest Moon* games for Nintendo and Sony consoles since 1996, as well as a handful of remakes and reissues. It's proven to be a hugely popular franchise, its appeal seemingly never wavering.

■ There are over 20 endings in *Harvest Moon*, and many of them are dependent on seeing all the weird and wonderful things that the game has to offer. From befriending a dog, to finding secret fairies after disasters to ultimately finding a wife and having a ream of kids.

In many respects, it's easy to be betrayed by *Harvest Moon*'s implied simplicity. There's a surprising depth to its systems, and that's part of its long-lasting appeal. Even the simple act of raising a healthy crop involves clearing the land of debris, using a hoe to prepare the soil, planting a batch of fresh seeds and then watering them daily. This needs to be repeated for every type of vegetable you may need for the harvest, and it'll take several days before your efforts bear any results. That may sound tedious, but the reward and value of *Harvest Moon* comes as you find your rhythm between these basic activities, caring for your livestock and enjoying a social life in the nearby village. By going through these motions you feel more connected to everything that you produce, proud of how quickly you can do them before moving on to other tasks. Eventually though, the game opens up, giving you the space and freedom to chose your own path, and that's where it really springs to life.

By the end of the simulated two and a half years, your returning father judges everything that you have achieved. He'll either dish out praise for restoring the farm to a picture of pristine productivity or you'll be admonished for spending your time chasing love, fishing in the sun and generally ignoring your birthright by exploring the lush mountainous countryside. Following your passions in *Harvest Moon* leads to a combination of 20 different endings, and it helps to wrap the entire experience up in a personal and relatable fashion; the hardships and time spent feel worth it in the end.

Ultimately, *Harvest Moon* was designed as escapism for producer Yasuhiro Wada. It was his dream to create a non-violent RPG built around his fond childhood memories of being out in the countryside, and that fantasy continues to delight players to this day. The original *Harvest Moon* spawned a franchise that's still active, still surprising and it's because the core competencies established in this SNES classic still play beautifully to this day.

GAME CHANGERS

EIGHT WAYS TO BECOME A BETTER FARMER

GETTING THE 'BEST' ENDING ON HARVEST MOON IS NO WALK IN THE PARK

HUG YOUR DOG

■ At the beginning of the game, as soon as you take over the farm from your father, you'll adopt a friendly dog. Ultimately, it'll look after itself – it doesn't require feeding or grooming like the other animals – but you'll want to take care of it if you want to get the best ending. Hugging your dog will raise your happiness. Do it over a 100 times to achieve greatness.
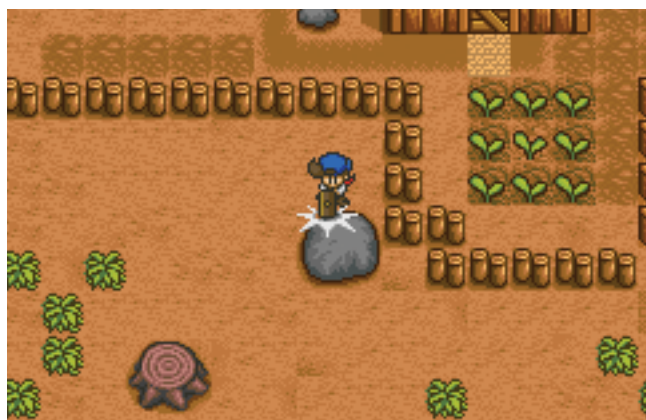
UPGRADE YOUR TOOLS

■ If you want any chance of fixing your farm, you'll need the best tools available. The basic tools will get the job done to an extent, but if you want to pull in a great harvest you'll want to upgrade your axe, hoe, hammer sickle, and watering can as quickly as possible. They allow you to work across a bigger area, not to mention putting less strain on your stamina.

BE MINDFUL OF SEASONS

■ Vegetables you can farm change depending on the season, which changes every 30 days in game. You're free to grow whatever you want in spring and summer, but during autumn the only things that grow are two variations of mushroom – one poisonous, the other is not. Winter is worse, as you'll be left to survive on herbs in the forest cave and your stores.

MANAGING INCOME

■ It's important to balance work and play, particularly in spring and summer. The bigger the harvest, the more you can squirrel away into the storage, and the more consistent your income will be as the barren winter approaches. Income is important for expanding your farm, repairing broken fences, buying new seeds, more animals and upgrading items.

BUY ANIMALS WISELY

■ To be happy in *Harvest Moon*, you need to own at least one cow and chicken, though you also need 10,000G in your possession. You don't get that sort of cash with turnips! Chickens produce eggs that can be sold – or hatched, should you wish to grow your roost. Cows produce great quantities of milk, so resist selling them to vendors for instant gain.

BE WARY OF COWS

■ Cows can destroy your farm in *Harvest Moon*. Not only do they require daily conversation, brushing and feeding, but if you make the mistake of purchasing a Miracle Potion, which will make the cow pregnant, you'll essentially be without its produce for a full 21 days. It just isn't worth the hassle or money. Instead, look to purchase a calf outright.

GET MARRIED

■ One of *Harvest Moon*'s side-quests is finding love. It's also integral to increasing your happiness and securing that picture-perfect ending. There are many suitors, and you'll need to gain their affection. As courtship develops you'll need to fulfil specific requirements and complete events before you can eventually purchase a blue feather for proposal.
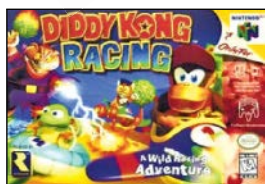

MARRIAGE IS HARD

■ That best ending also requires your family to include two children – no easy task. For starters, happiness and the heart gauge needs to be through the roof – remember, if you stay out of the house farming past 6pm you'll lose a few affection points. You'll also need enough cash to expand your house, buy a double bed and keep your farm clean.

BEHIND THE SCENES

DIDDY KONG RACING

Appearing as if from out of nowhere in 1997, Diddy Kong Racing saved N64's second Christmas and beat Nintendo at its own game. Now, 12 years on, Rare speaks out about the making of its classic racer

■ Beating the character TT in the time trial races took many an hour and saw controllers across the world being thrown against the wall.

Released: 21 November 1997
Format: Nintendo 64
Publisher: Nintendo
Developer: Rare

KEY STAFF:
Design
Lee Schuneman
Martin Wakeley
Software
Rob Harrison
Paul Mountain
John Pegg
Richard Gale
Art
Kevin Bayliss
Lee Musgrave
(Rare's Head of Art)
Keith Rabbette
Dean Smith
Johnni Christensen
Bryan Smyth
Paul Cunningham
Audio
Dave Wise
Graeme Norgate

DIDDY KONG RACING was destined to be a hit. It combined the gameplay of both *Super Mario 64* and *Mario Kart 64*, added a cast of likeable characters, and was released as a special N64 surprise in the run up to Christmas. How could anyone resist? However, given the fact that both *Mario Kart 64* and *Super Mario 64* didn't influence the production; that Nintendo, and with it Diddy Kong, was nowhere near the title until the last moment; and that it was never intended as a Christmas release until just a few months prior, you begin to realise that the game's success was far from predictable.

Diddy Kong Racing signalled the dawning of a new era for Rare and set it upon the directorial route it would take to this day. As Lee Schuneman, who was game director on *Diddy Kong Racing* and is currently Rare's head of production, explains, the initial vision for the game was far from clear. "It was a series of iterations trying different things until we got an interesting approach," he remembers.

As Schuneman recalls, "A team of four – Chris Stamper, lead engineer on the project from the start; Lee Musgrave on art; Rob Harrison on Software; and me – initially worked on a Caveman/time-travel RTS for N64, for which I did an initial design and Lee Musgrave did some art. But this didn't last long." Ultimately, the RTS game was abandoned and the team set out once more to look for an interesting idea and began to look at creating a 'fun racer' using some of the RTS assets, such as woolly mammoths, to populate the game in its early stages of development.

As with many gamers, the words 'fun racer' brought to Schuneman's mind a joyful memory of a certain SNES classic. "I loved *Mario Kart* on SNES. Before I got my job at Rare in April 1996 on *Donkey Kong Land 2*, I took great pleasure in racing against all my friends. We spent hours playing that game, so it obviously influenced the racing part of *Diddy*
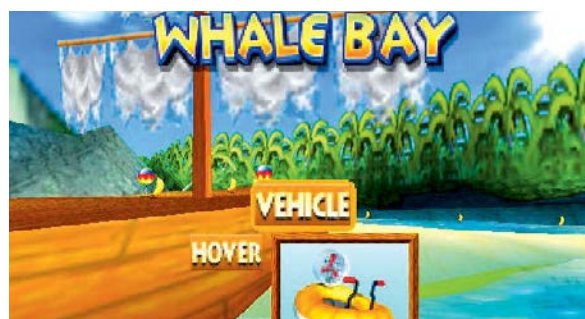
MARIO KART ON SNES INFLUENCED THE RACING PART OF DIDDY KONG RACING

■ Much like its predecessor *Mario Kart 64,*
Diddy Kong Racing had many short cuts
hidden away in the levels.

■ A lot of collectable items were scattered around
the various worlds, adding hours of gameplay that
kept gamers warm over the winter of 1997.

FROM THE FORUM

Posted by:
HAZY HAZE

◢ *Diddy Kong Racing* was truly special for me. I was utterly blown away. The snowy levels were just perfect for the season. As a racing game it was evolutionary, it was also like an adventure game, and the notion of boss battles was pretty much unprecedented. The multiple vehicles slant was superb, and each felt different while the weighting for multiplayer battle split-screen was very well done. I loved the system of collecting balloons, which made the game very addictive.

Posted by:
BINARYROOSTER

◢ Beautiful graphics and presentation soon give way to some of the most spiteful difficulty spikes in gaming history. Finish in first place and pick up all the silver coins on the way. One mistake and you have to restart the whole race. Never has a game named after a monkey and featuring a large collection of cute woodland animals had such hardcore gameplay.

Posted by:
ROTEK

◢ This was one of the first N64 games I played, and I loved it. When I set up my N64 earlier this year it was one of the first games I played. I loved the free-roaming hub structure that was more like a platformer than anything else. It also reminded me how mind-numbingly hard it was. Who on earth thought that making the player finish first in every single race was a good idea?! Still, there was a lot of replay value, the boss battles were pretty cool, and the vehicle options were a nice touch. It also introduced the gaming world to such Rare stable mates as Banjo, Conker and, er, Pippy the mouse.

Posted by:
FATBOYSLICK

◢ The multiplayer was nowhere near as good as *Mario Kart 64*, but for one player it was untouchable – arguably what *MK64* should have been. I loved the setup: the hub level to choose races, the different vehicles and loose storyline and secrets. The Christmas levels really sold it to me – genius.

Diddy Kong Racing DS

FOR THOSE FANS still savouring the sweetness of the original, *Diddy Kong Racing DS* cut through palates like a sour prune, but then, given Schuneman's reasoning for the game, that's hardly surprising. "We wanted our handheld team to learn the DS, and doing that with a new game was not the right choice." So Rare broke a key rule of business by putting itself before its market, and paid the price with a substandard game.

But it wasn't all doom and gloom. "Commercially it has done very well, so overall we are happy with it," adds Schuneman, and it met the initial aim laid before it: to be a launch pad and research tool for Rare. "We learned to only use DS features when it suits the experience. We probably shouldn't have used the touch capability at all [for instance] as it doesn't really suit the experience. Just because something is there, doesn't mean you should use it." The good news, as Schuneman sees it, is that the lessons learned ultimately benefit the next game. "We took the lessons learned on to *Viva Piñata DS* and we were all a lot happier with how that game plays." Sadly, however, Rare's handheld division was closed down in 2008, so we'll probably never see what else it can achieve with the two-screened wonder.

Kong Racing." Such was the popularity of *Mario Kart* that, were *Diddy Kong Racing* to be just a fun racer, it would inevitably have been slighted as a clone of Nintendo's classic. Thankfully, racing was only half of the game Schuneman had in mind. The other half was a far more innovative adventure.

No other game had attempted *Diddy Kong Racing*'s feat of splicing adventure gameplay with racing, so for inspiration the team looked beyond the game industry. Schuneman reveals that the adventure element was actually inspired by Disney World. "The initial design of the adventure world was a lot more theme park based and evolved [from there]," he explains. And so the team of four worked around the idea of using a central hub area that interlinked worlds, offering discovery and adventure akin to platform games but played out with racing. Though limited manpower temporarily reduced the game – then titled *Wild Cartoon Kingdom* – to what Schuneman describes as "an early design iteration, rather than a project we actually made", it soon gained momentum. "Over a short period, *Wild Cartoon Kingdom* developed into *Adventure Racers*, and a team was built to develop it."

▪▪▪ **WITH PRODUCTION BEGINNING** in earnest on a truly unique title, Schuneman was fortunate enough to receive a blessing most in the industry today can only dream of: freedom. "There was no specific force saying 'make it like this or like that'. There was no involvement from Nintendo in terms of content. It was the game we wanted to make." Ironically, many gamers looking back on *Diddy Kong Racing* may view this freedom as a wolf in sheep's clothing, critiquing the game as being too large, a product of unbridled enthusiasm in the production.

LEE SCHUNEMAN
Director

Nevertheless, the freedom gave the team free rein to add a lot of unique content.

Schuneman's summation of the project clarifies the scope of the game's design: "The game structure was based around doing different style races – A to B, Standard, and Exploring – and doing different things on the track, such as the silver coin challenge. We also wanted some grand-prix-style racing in the form of Trophy Challenges, and because it was adventure style we then had the Boss Races." And as if that wasn't enough, they then decided to, "Mirror everything, re-position the silver coins and have Adventure 2", effectively doubling the size of an already expansive game. Why the generous amount of content? "It was just about loads of people who were really new to making games, really passionate about making a great, fun game and not knowing any better," Schuneman says with a hint of irony.

Like an artist applying paint to canvas, the emotion of the team that created the project shone through in the final product. That emotion was pure enthusiasm, and everything about *Diddy Kong Racing* smacks of it, from the cute characters and their silly voices – "I was the voice of Bumper", reveals Schuneman – to the bright colours that looked like a child had been let loose on a paint board.

Listening to Schuneman talk reveals just how enthusiastic he is about *Diddy Kong Racing* today. "My favourite character is TT. I like his stupid voice [recorded by artist Dean Smith] and he was the fastest character to drive so became a Time Trial choice. And I really liked Frosty Village because it has a great Christmas feel. Also, Dave Wise did a ridiculously catchy soundtrack." All this love and yet, as Schuneman chillingly remembers, "It took

■ A concept sketch for the level Dark Moon Caverns. The DS version of *Diddy Kong Racing* put us a step closer to Rare by allowing custom track creation.
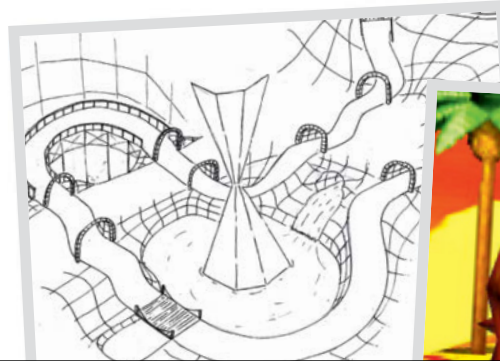
THE ADVENTURE ELEMENT WAS IN FACT INSPIRED BY THE DISNEY WORLD THEME PARK

around 14 months to develop in an old converted barn with no windows, just big fans on the wall to blow in air during the hot summer."

■■■ **THOSE 14 MONTHS** were spent drafting and creating ideas. "I'd come up with a theme – 'moon surface', for example – then give the artists a track layout on paper and they'd make it look incredible," Schuneman reveals. "We would then iterate the track shape, ensuring it flowed right for racing. I would then go in and set up all the AI paths and AI levels so they gave you a good race." The direct control that Schuneman had over the project, as he illustrates here, allowed the game a vast array of imaginative content. Where the majority of titles these days have very clear plan documents, which direct, and ultimately restrict, the team's work, Schuneman was effectively given a blank canvas and told to draw.

As he explains, the overall game design and world-layout were created with the express purpose of realising his eclectic visions of individualistic level design. "The point was to make each location around a general theme – dinosaurs, ice, space and so on – but then make each race track within that theme very different in style so you always wanted to see what was next." This is where the relevance of the 'theme park' hub area comes into play. By separating the central world into sub-worlds, each containing
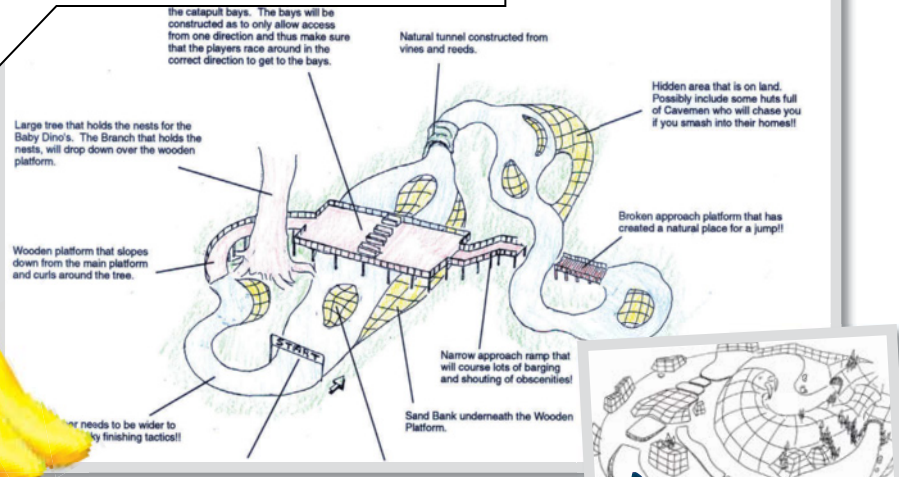
individual levels, *Diddy Kong Racing* allowed those artistic, enthusiastic ideas – which would never realistically coexist – to be included while maintaining the illusion of a single, solid world.

Though the 'central hub' technique had already been used in other games, its usage in a racer allowed *Diddy Kong Racing* to avoid the issue of repetition. Given the prominence of this problem in the genre, it's a wonder so few of *Diddy Kong Racing*'s brethren have made use of the trick. Had *DKR* failed in any way, its lack of concrete inspiration to racers would be reasonable. The fact is the game received excellent reviews and even won the Console Racing Award at the 1998

The catapult bays. The bays will be constructed as to only allow access from one direction and thus make sure that the players race around in the correct direction to get to the bays.

Natural tunnel constructed from vines and reeds.

Large tree that holds the nests for the Baby Dino's. The Branch that holds the nests, will drop down over the wooden platform.

Hidden area that is on land. Possibly include some huts full of Cavemen who will chase you if you smash into their homes!!

Wooden platform that slopes down from the main platform and curls around the tree.

Broken approach platform that has created a natural place for a jump!!

Narrow approach ramp that will course lots of barging and shouting of obscenities!

Sand Bank underneath the Wooden Platform.

...er needs to be wider to ...y finishing tactics!!

>. A GAMING EVOLUTION

Following in the tyre marks of *Mario Kart 64*, *Diddy Kong Racing* expanded the gameplay with a hub world, boss battles, and a whole variety of different vehicles.

DKR was such an innovative spin on the kart racer that others soon imitated it. *Crash Team Racing* copied both the hub world and boss battles.

The originality of level design, in which each course has alternative routes and unique graphics, really made the game stand out from the pack.

Interactive Achievement Awards. And yet, as Schuneman says: "No one has really gone down this route [splicing platforming and racing]." This is surprising given that Schuneman places predominant credit for the game's success on "the structure and choices the game gives you", which were possible thanks to that initial hub design revelation. "You're not going to get any old generic race track," says Schuneman, comparing *Diddy Kong Racing* to the average racer. "It's going to be an exciting new world full of imagination. So the adventure structure with lots of choices, the unique world design, and the great core racing mechanic gave it strength, depth, and ultimately made it a unique and addictive game." Thankfully, the one company that saw the brilliance of *Diddy Kong Racing* was the one that mattered most: Nintendo.

BEING THE FIRST game Schuneman had ever worked on from the beginning, he was naturally keen to see the reception from Rare's parent company and publisher. In June 1997 he got the chance. "We demoed the title to Miyamoto at E3 1997. It was an experience for me, having only been at Rare for a year, to get to demo and play our game against Miyamoto." Schuneman shares his foremost recollection of what must surely have been one of the high points of his career. "I beat him in multiplayer." Thank goodness the all-too-cheery Miyamoto wasn't offended. So pleased, in fact, were he and Nintendo that they offered the game one of their lead mascots: Diddy Kong. "Diddy wasn't in the game at the time and the title was actually *Pro Am 64* – an intended sequel to NES game *RC-Pro Am*. We didn't even have cars, but instead had these three-wheeled trike things. They didn't last long." At first almost audaciously, the team of newcomers who had sweated

What They Said...

This game beats *Mario Kart 64* in every department. The gameplay is balanced and requires more strategy. The levels are way more interesting. The Adventure mode is a lot of fun.

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in the barn for over a year to produce *Pro AM 64* didn't take too kindly to the idea of using one of Nintendo's finest characters in their game. "I remember we were all initially against using Diddy Kong, but it's a good job we listened in the end as being part of the Donkey Kong brand was a great plus." Not only did Diddy's visage add to the commerciality of the title, but the relationship with Nintendo also resulted in a hefty marketing expenditure. With the delay of *Banjo-Kazooie*, which was originally intended to be Rare's big N64 release of Christmas 1997, Nintendo moved *Diddy Kong Racing* into that lucrative position and backed it with TV and other marketing campaigns. Certainly, the newcomers were glad they'd come to terms with the idea of Diddy taking the helm. Though *Pro AM 64* probably would have received great reviews, it certainly wouldn't have met the same commercial success as *Diddy Kong Racing* sitting at the back of shelves at Christmas with little marketing and lacking the support of the Donkey Kong brand.

It's touching that *Diddy Kong Racing* ended up being the big N64 release for Christmas 1997. The theme suited the season perfectly and the graphics were as sweet as the treats in our stockings, but above all, it married with Christmas in the spirit of birth. As Schuneman heartily recalls: "Most of [the team] were making their first game. It was a great development period with a brilliant team of people, so the passion and drive were incredible." Though this inexperience could easily have resulted in a misguided and ultimately poor title, Schuneman

The original proposed design for the 'central hub' area that connects the worlds and allows for the *Mario 64*-style exploration.
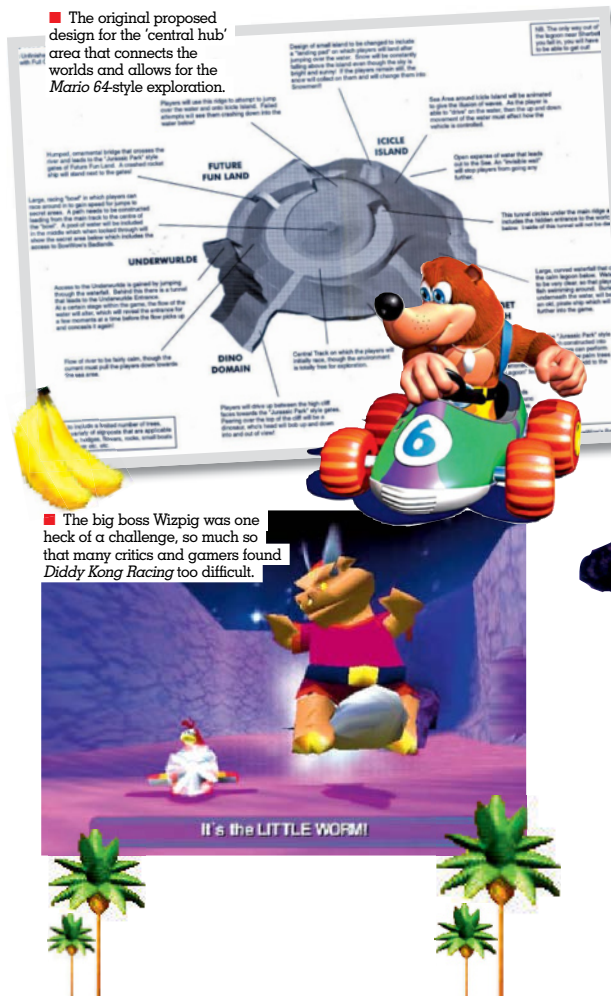
The big boss Wizpig was one heck of a challenge, so much so that many critics and gamers found *Diddy Kong Racing* too difficult.

It's the LITTLE WORM!

explains that, with Rare behind them, the team didn't fear the unknown, but rather pressed on with passion for their lofty aspirations. "Other teams at Rare were very successful and because Rare awarded excellent royalties – and still does – some of those people were earning huge sums of money. So when you are in a company like that, with success around you, it makes you want to be successful and drives you to do the best you can. With that underlying motivation in place at Rare and with a talented and passionate group of people new to making games, everyone wanted to produce the best game they could." And they did. For a team comprising mostly newcomers to the industry to set upon the most competitive time of the year and conquer the market is an incredible accomplishment. To do so while daring to create a unique, untested genre was unheard of. The 4.88 million sales worldwide were well earned, as were the team members' continuing positions at Rare. As Schuneman proudly states: "Most of the team remain at Rare, and a lot of them worked on *Banjo-Kazooie: Nuts & Bolts*."

As with any great Christmas tale, this story ends with a beginning – the beginning of a childlike sense of exploration and fun. Prior to 1997, Rare was renowned for such titles as *Sabre Wulf*, *Battletoads*, *Killer Instinct* and *GoldenEye*, all of which were stylised with mature modernist graphics and relied on perfecting gaming conventions. Then came Schuneman and his new production team, bearing *Diddy Kong Racing* – a game plastered with enough cuteness to match a *Teletubbies* Christmas special and with revolutionary gameplay.

As Schuneman ascended the Rare ladder so, too, did cuteness and innovation bubble up the scales. Though many hardcore gamers will suggest that the earlier period of Rare was better, the daring that saw the company combine adventure gaming and racing

MOST OF THE TEAM REMAIN AT RARE, AND MANY WORKED ON NUTS & BOLTS

over ten years ago has moved it from perfecting other people's innovations to creating its own. But why does that need to be done in cutesy colour definition? Perhaps the truth is that Schuneman is some sort of sugar-bearing Santa Claus, out to spread joy throughout the world. Or perhaps, as the man himself states: "The annoying kids' laugh sample at the start of the game, which haunts me forever", has taken over Rare with some sort of ESRB-friendly incantation. Either way, among today's gloomy and violent visual staples, it's a refreshing change, and little cost for having Rare lead us into new gaming territories. **g**

■ The woolly mammoth from Rare's cancelled RTS only made it as far as the *Diddy Kong Racing* prototype. We just wish they'd kept him in.

■ The donkey and crab below are two of the original character designs from when *Diddy Kong Racing* was known as *Wild Cartoon Kingdom*. Neither progressed past the concept stage, but the designs remain in Rare's vault to this day.

The Legend Of Diddy Kong
From 16-bit hero to 64-bit saviour

IT'S IRONIC THAT the *Diddy Kong Racing* team should have initially disapproved of Diddy Kong's appearance in the game given that Rare itself had created him in the first place. Though Diddy's concept in *Donkey Kong Country* was taken from Donkey Kong Jr – who first appeared in the game of the same name in 1982 – he was renovated by Rare after Nintendo demanded they change either his name or his appearance. As it was Rare that essentially created Diddy, taking him from strength to strength in the *Donkey Kong Country* series, it is fitting that the character should lead one of Rare's most innovative titles to dominate the Christmas market in 1997.

And this market dominance was well rewarded. Much as Diddy's visage gave grounding to what was *Pro AM 64*, Rare's game brought him superstardom, for though he was the lead in *Donkey Kong Country: Diddy Kong's Quest*, he was still part of Donkey Kong's world, hence making *Diddy Kong Racing* the first game in which he stepped into the limelight in his own right. Subsequently, Diddy Kong has appeared in such Nintendo promenades as Mario *Kart: Double Dash!!*, *Super Smash Bros Brawl* and *Mario Golf: Toadstool Tour*. Where once he was dwarfed by the gargantuan shadows of his pal Donkey Kong, now he himself stands as a leader of the pack.

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LYLAT WARS N64 [Nintendo] 1997

■ Nintendo's sensational *Star Fox* sequel deserves to top many different 'best of' lists, but this month we'd like to pay special attention to its memorable final boss. Andross, or Uncle Andross to his friends, is like the classic *Sinistar* boss in that he likes to chew his enemies and spit them out, but he does so much more, too. The N64's advanced audio capabilities were used to give Andross a voice, which he used to taunt you for much of the final level. And the game's multiple routes actually revealed three different Andross forms depending on how you played. One revealed a robotic skull beneath the monkey skin and another saw you fight a giant brain connected to two floating eyeballs. Creepy.

BEST BOSS

GAME CHANGERS
GOLDENEYE 007

Released:1997 **Publisher:** Nintendo **Developer:** Rare **System:** Nintendo 64

GoldenEye became the N64's third best selling game of all time, with incredible critical acclaim and multiplayer appeal contributing to its 8 million sales.

More than just a movie tie-in, Rare's seminal first-person shooter rewrote the genre playbook and provided Nintendo's console with a multiplayer classic

ARRIVING DURING THE golden age of first-person shooters, Rare's *GoldenEye 007* stood out from the overcrowded PC scene, landing on Nintendo's doorstep in 1997 on a wave of critical hype and acclaim. Until this point, many dismissed console platforms as unsuited to first-person shooters, instead sitting behind their PCs engrossed in *Doom*, *Quake* and *Wolfenstein*. *GoldenEye* arrived with an appropriate bang, highlighting consoles as a viable FPS platform for the first time and contributing significantly to the Nintendo 64's appeal.

With Martin Hollis in the director's chair, the game was moulded by the same prolific collective that would be responsible for *Perfect Dark*, *Banjo-Kazooie* and *Conker's Bad Fur Day* further down the line. Rare was hitting heights that many developers would only dream of, and generated some of the best output of the Nineties. Members of the same team would later form Free Radical, responsible for the equally excellent *TimeSplitters* series.

From the more sedate beginnings of the Dam level right through to the dramatic conclusion atop a large satellite array, *GoldenEye* took you on a monumental journey, fighting your way through Soviet control centres, the streets of St Petersburg, the jungles of Cuba and what looks strangely like a reclamation site. The world that Rare built was a potent influence on first-person shooters that followed, and represented the first mainstream FPS with a truly international feel.

The film, released two years earlier, obviously influenced the game's design. Hollis and his team – thanks to the 64-bit power of Nintendo's machine – managed to achieve high levels of fidelity compared to the bog-standard output of the big movie licensing boom of the Eighties. Never before had there been a licensed game based on a movie that looked so much like its counterpart, and there haven't been many since then that have been as successful creatively or mechanically. Rare had access to set plans while developing, and due to this you can enjoy direct parallels with the film. It is still a joy to this day to jump from the dam at the end of the first level, for example – If you know the film, you'll be aware that it begins with Bond running and then performing the iconic bungie jump. In the game, however, there is an entire Russian compound that must be infiltrated

FOR ENGLAND, JAMES | GOLDENEYE OFFERED A DEEPER EXPERIENCE THAN MANY OF ITS PC COMPETITORS WITH THESE ELEMENTS


Aztec Complex, Teotihuaca'n

IMAGINATION

★ Martin Hollis and his team used the movie as a strong basis for the action in the game, but were unafraid to extend and adapt certain sections to enhance the experience. From being able to drop down into the bathroom in Facility to fighting Jaws in an Aztec temple, *GoldenEye* offers a refreshing take on movie adaptations.

LEVEL DESIGN

★ Ask anyone who played *GoldenEye* back in 1997 where the hidden body armour is in Cradle or where the RC-P90 is in Train, and they'll be able to tell you in a heartbeat. Rare's levels are diverse and memorable, borrowing directly from the film and expanding neatly on locations that the film brushed over.
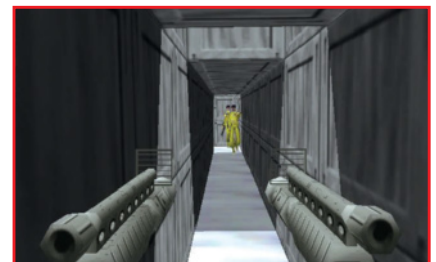
WEAPONRY

★ Even now in the midst of the largest FPS movement in history thanks to *Call Of Duty* and *Battlefield*, *GoldenEye*'s array of weapons still stands out. This is no more apparent than when the 'All Guns' cheat is enabled, which not only provides you with every variety of firearm available naturally, but extras like a nifty taser.

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before then. It almost gives the sense that the film begins in medias res – that by playing the game you're actually seeing the whole picture.

This is true with later levels too, thrusting Bond (impressively rendered to resemble Pierce Brosnan) into scenarios that were either only touched upon in the movie or entirely built for purpose. There are encounters in the Severnaya computer complex that Bond never visits in the movie, instead watching the facility be destroyed by an EMP blast from the GoldenEye satellite. And after protecting Natalya in Trevelyan's control centre towards the end of the game, you pursue the former 006 through some labyrinthine water caverns before eventually encountering him on top of the satellite array, in contrast to the film's simple jaunt in an elevator.

This willingness to adapt culminates in two secret levels that can be accessed after you've completed the game on Secret Agent and 00 Agent difficulties respectively. These levels – Aztec and Temple – showed a wider knowledge of James Bond, pitting Bond against two old nemeses in the form of Jaws and Baron Samedi. The Golden Gun makes an

KEY FACTS

■ *GoldenEye* was intitially intended to be an on-rails shooter in the same vein as *Virtua Cop* and *Time Crisis*, but thankfully this was reconsidered.

■ Several levels were designed with the film sets in mind. The best examples of these can be found at the end of the Dam level, the bathroom and bottling room in Facility, the interrogation and library areas of Archives, and the Cradle level where you fight Trevelyan.

■ It is actually possible to control the game using two controllers at once, allowing for first-person control similar to that which you would find nowadays.

appearance. The temple is based on *The Spy Who Loved Me*. Aztec is actually Hugo Drax's jungle base from *Moonraker*. It shows a true love for Bond that few games have ever managed, allowing the more fantastical and tongue-in-cheek elements of the franchise to creep in from time to time.

■■■ By adding non-linear objectives, Rare further broke the first-person shooter mould, tasking you with approaching levels in a more considered manner on higher difficulties. On Agent difficulty these objectives are fairly basic, but on Secret Agent and 00 Agent it became quite testing. What's interesting is the lack of hand holding – certain objectives are either hidden away or more technical in nature, requiring a higher level of care than *GoldenEye*'s FPS forbears.

It all purveys production values that weren't really found in first-person shooters at this time, and that's where you can easily connect the dots between *GoldenEye* and modern shooters like *Call Of Duty* and *Battlefield*. Protecting Natalya in the control room, pursuing Trevelyan in the Cradle level, rescuing hostages on board the frigate – these elements were unexpected from a licensed game in 1997, and are common tropes of the genre today.

But *GoldenEye*'s legacy isn't just found in contemporary first-person shooters; it represents an industry shift. Would we have such a huge FPS player base today if it wasn't for Rare's masterpiece? Probably, yes, but it's likely that it would have taken longer to catch on. It also arguably represents the pinnacle of movie licensing. *GoldenEye* is still prevalent in the hearts and minds of many players today, and for that it is worthy of respect, reassessment and, of course, a playthrough if you get the chance.

NEVER BEFORE HAD THERE BEEN A LICENSED GAME THAT LOOKED SO MUCH LIKE ITS COUNTERPART

GAME CHANGERS

GET AHEAD IN MULTIPLAYER

WE MAY BE AROUND 17 YEARS TOO LATE TO THE PARTY, BUT REGARDLESS, **GAMES™** IS ON HAND TO GUIDE YOU TO CERTAIN VICTORY IN GOLDENEYE MULTIPLAYER MODE
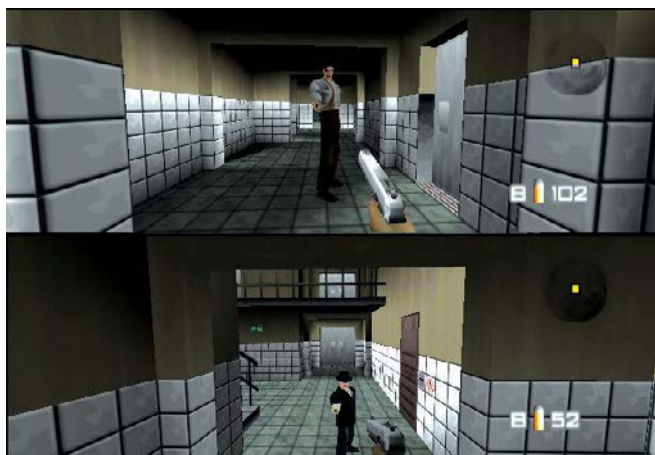

CHARACTER SELECT

■ The first step on the path to multiplayer success is carefully picking your character. It is worth noting that in some circles, selecting Oddjob is considered to be foul play, Auric Goldfinger's deadly yet diminutive henchman standing considerably shorter than other selectable characters. It's highly recommended that you avoid Jaws – as the tallest, and wearing a highly visible white shirt, he is easy to spot and hit. Try and pick a character that's a little more nondescript, such as Trevelyan, who stands at an average height and whose black clothing blends in nicely with the darker backdrops of some of the maps such as Temple and Caves.

LEARN YOUR MAPS

■ Much like any modern first-person shooter, learning *GoldenEye*'s map layouts is essential if you want to embarrass your friends at multiplayer. As well as getting to grips with the basic layouts, it's also worth noting where secret passages and hidey-holes are. Several of these secret pathways are key to success, such as the vents that can be walked through in Complex and the sliding walls that appear in Temple, Library, Basement and Archives. These are all useful for the stealthier player, but if you fancy being offensive-minded and fighting from a cover-based position, then get yourself up on the raised platforms in Complex.
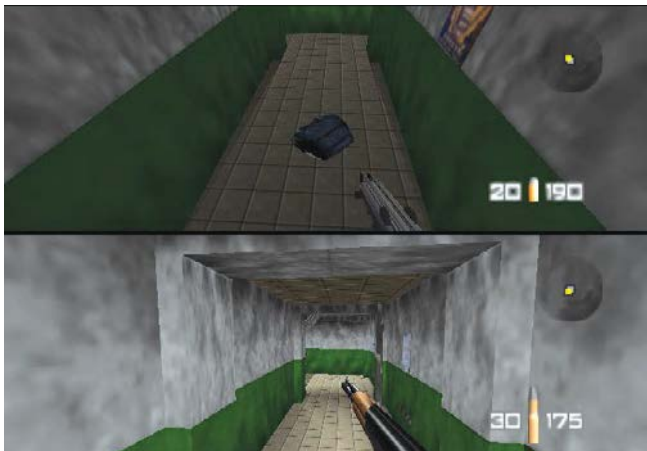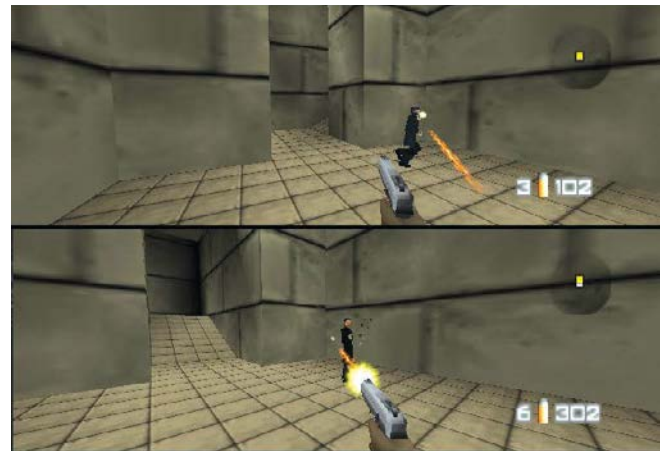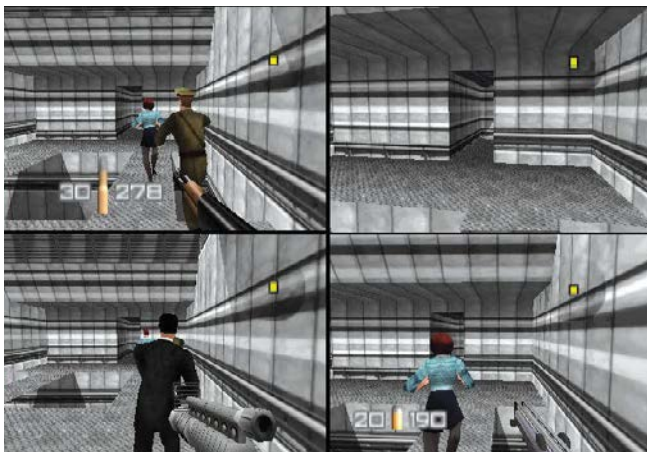
ARMOUR UP

■ It's worth noting that body armour can be found on each of the maps, and finding it and occupying areas near it are surefire ways to get ahead. Refer to step two – body armour is usually located in hidden areas, and so try to be experimental as you traverse the maps. Body armour essentially doubles your health, and in a one-on-one firefight with an enemy it can be the decider.

THE GOLDENEYE STRAFE

■ Never underestimate the power of the strafe. As far as techniques go this is imperative by holding the C-Left and C-Right buttons you can strafe with ease, making it much harder for your opponents to hit you. Try and be unpredictable; walking in a straight line is a very modern concept – get crazy with strafing and watch the bullets whizz harmlessly past you.

BE DISHONEST

■ When all else fails, just cheat. You're playing with friends after all – it's quite likely that they'll forgive you. To do this effectively, select Oddjob quickly and start the game before your opponents know what's happening. Alternatively, beat the game to unlock extra characters in advance, allowing you to select the Moonraker Elite – she is as short as Oddjob, and with a non-specific name, is easier to get away with.

The key technique for robbing a win with any character, though, can be easily achieved once in the game. Hold down R to aim and then rock back with C-Down to crouch. From this position, it is near impossible for other players to hit you without using the cumbersome aim button or crouching themselves. Get down low, find the best weapon you can and then unleash Hell.

Caught out doing both of the above? Don't worry; your greatest weapon is sight. Why waste your time looking at your own portion of the screen? Instead, you should be looking at every screen other than your own. No radar? No problem. If you've learned the maps well enough, a quick glance at an opponent's screen will enable you to ascertain their position and move in for the kill.

■ Above: Shorter characters always had the upper hands in a game of *GoldenEye*. With vertical aiming a concept that was relatively uncommon at the time, characters like Oddjob or Moonraker Elite were a fast track to success. Below: By much the same standard, crouching with a standard character was also a great way of frustrating your opponent.
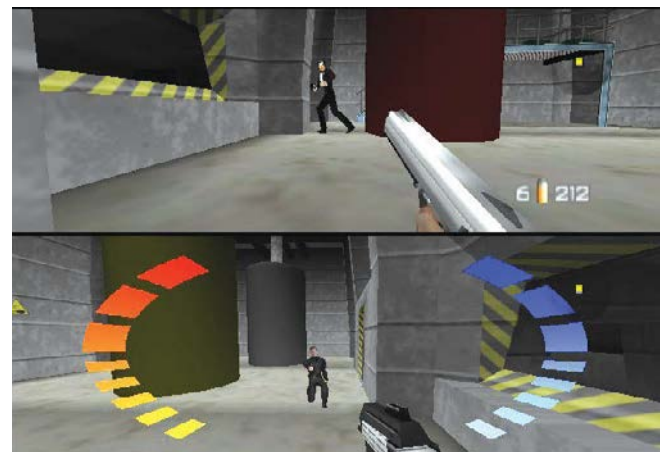
LINK'S REAWAKENING

As one of the greatest games of all time returns in its definitive edition, We examine The Legend Of Zelda: Ocarina Of Time 3D and assess its worth as both a retro remake and a game in its own right

OCARINA OF TIME 3D, simply put, is much more than just a standard remake or re-release. Yet this is how it's been brushed aside by naysayers looking to criticise N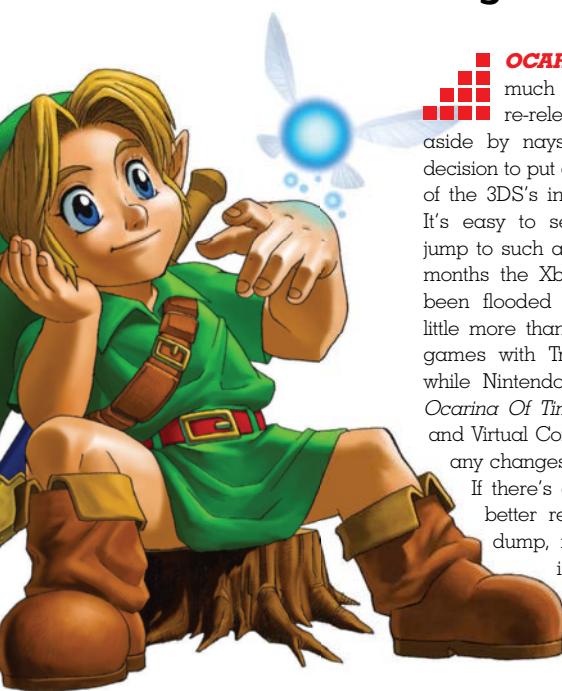intendo's decision to put a thirteen-year-old game at the forefront of the 3DS's initial wave of first-party software. It's easy to see how the uninformed would jump to such a conclusion, of course. In recent months the Xbox 360 and PlayStation 3 have been flooded with 'HD Collections' that are little more than slightly upscaled PlayStation 2 games with Trophy or Achievement support, while Nintendo itself has already re-released *Ocarina Of Time* twice before, on GameCube and Virtual Console, without bothering to make any changes to the ageing, blurry, Nintendo 64 title. If there's any single videogame that deserves a better re-release than an unceremonial ROM dump, it's *Ocarina Of Time*. An undisputedly important title in the evolution of the medium, it established many of the rules of 3D action games, which continue to be used to this day. Those who played it back in 1998 were blown away by the goliath strides it made ahead of its contemporaries, and were rewarded with an unforgettable experience that defined both the time in which it was released and the *Zelda* series as a whole. For many, the series has remained of a consistently high quality ever since but has simultaneously failed to recapture the same sense of occasion that the N64 breakthrough achieved. For those people, there is an unbreakable bond of nostalgia, but one that hasn't truly been catered to until now. Returning to the original cartridge presents the fifth *Zelda* game exactly as it was in reality, but not as it exists in the memories of its fans, as an idealised experience. It's the way those people felt when they played the game, not necessarily what they did, that needs to be re-captured.

IF ANY SINGLE GAME DESERVES MORE THAN AN UNCEREMONIAL ROM DUMP, THIS IS IT

Ocarina Of Time 3D therefore needed to serve three purposes all at once. It needed to update the visuals to modern standards in a way that simultaneously stays true to the original vision; it needed to appeal to contemporary gamers who have never played *Ocarina Of Time* before; and it needed to present a package that adds value for those who have already committed every corner of Hyrule to memory. And we're

■ 'Hey, listen!' Despite all the changes and improvements, Link's fairy companion, Navi, sadly remains a bit of an annoying pest.


happy to say that it does all of these things, though with varying degrees of success.

■■■ IN REDRAWING the visuals, Nintendo and co-developer Grezzo have demonstrated a lightness of touch that many other developers involved with remakes would do well to study. At first glance this is the *Ocarina Of Time* we all remember, but it's only when you compare the new and the old side by side that you see just how much work has been put in. Every texture has been redrawn with much more detail and colour, while character models have been fleshed out. These new visuals perfectly walk the thin line that was necessary of such an important remake, achieving a look that's as attractive as possible without throwing away the personality of the original game in the process. You only need look at the way other modern overhauls of old games, (like the XBLA edition of *Guardian Heroes*, for example) have spoiled what was good about the original game's visuals to appreciate how brilliant a feat this is.

All of this visual splendour, and that's before the 3D slider has been touched. Push it all the way to the top and Link's world springs to life in extraordinary ways. Putting every other 3DS game yet released to shame, *Ocarina Of Time* is the first to really show off what 3D without glasses can really do to improve videogames. Even on just an aesthetic level, it is an undeniable triumph. Link himself has been meticulously modelled in three dimensions, every detail occupying its own position in 3D space to the point where it really looks as though there's a little elf boy running around in a world that exists just behind the window of the 3DS screen.

Head To Head

On first impression, the difference between the N64 and 3DS versions might seem insignificant, but take a closer look and you'll see just how much effort the developers have made, basically redrawing the whole game

■ Though the layout of the locations remains the same, it's easy to see that a certain amount of detail and vibrancy has been added to the remake. The most noticeable difference here is the way the new backgrounds are formed from individually rendered trees rather than a single textured wall.
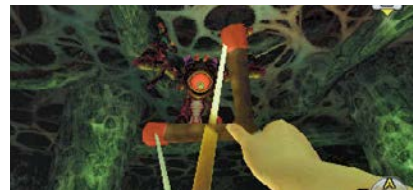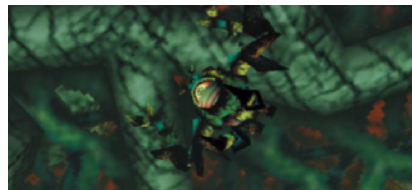
■ The ceiling of Gohma's lair is a bit of a blurry mess in the N64 original but has been redone on 3DS, making the webbing more noticeable, and adding distance between those webs and the ceiling to create a greater sense of depth.
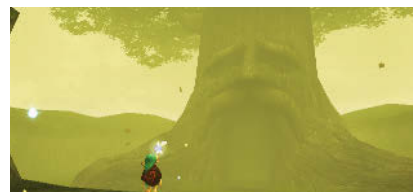
■ N64's Deku Tree looked like a big tree with fake eyebrows and moustache glued onto it, but the redone version looks as though its facial features have been carved or grown out of the bark. It's a much more convincing tree-creature-thing.

■ Emerging into Hyrule field has lost some of its allure in the blocky and blurry N64 edition, but on 3DS it recaptures the thrill with its convincing lush greenery, warming lense flair and a volcano that's fully modelled in 3D rather than as a 2D bitmap.
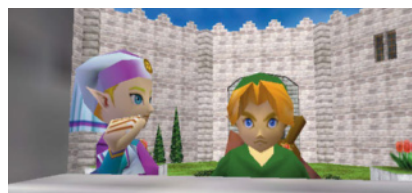
■ Within the confines of Zelda's castle, it's easy to see just how dramatic an overhaul this remake is. The walls look like crusty Lego bricks on N64 but have been redrawn with a much crisper resolution and more hand-painted detail. The close-ups of Link and Zelda also show just how much effort has gone into subtly remodelling the characters.
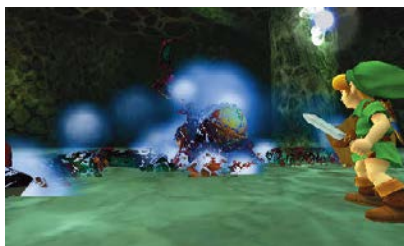
■ The increase in detail really hammers home the difference between the young and older Link now, even down to his bodily proportions.

Spend some more time with the 3D on and you really begin to appreciate why Nintendo chose to make this thirteen-year-old game the flagship title for its newest hardware. *Ocarina Of Time* was the first *Zelda* designed with three-dimensional polygon graphics in mind, and used every trick available at the time to show off what made the shift so different to the 2D games of old. The way you first emerge onto Hyrule field and see it stretch out before you towards the distant horizon; the way new areas are introduced through a camera that starts on Link and then pulls back through the scenery to show the sheer scale of the place; the way dungeons are designed with the interaction between multiple floors in mind: all play around with size, scale and position in spectacular fashion. That wow factor has been diminished somewhat over the years as other games have gone bigger and more expansive, but the use of 3D adds depth to the spectacle once again and recaptures that sense of wonder. Yet again, it's a feature that suits the retro remake perfectly – not doggedly recreating a facsimile of the original, warts and all, but presenting a definitive version that makes the player feel the same as they did the first time they played it.

There are other improvements made beyond the visuals too. The sound has been significantly enhanced, particularly in the way it takes advantage of the 3DS's far-too-underused surround sound functions. There are some puzzles in *Ocarina Of Time* that demand the use of the ears as much as the eyes, particularly in the Lost Woods where the sound of music guides you through the maze. On the Nintendo 64, the designers used varying volume levels to indicate whether you

were going in the right direction or not, but the 3DS actually positions the sound around you to create an audible sense of space. This trick generally extends to the ambient sounds of Hyrule too, and is instrumental in the expert way in which the game immerses you in its world. Much like the 3D, play with the sound off and you'll really miss out.

All of this immersion would be for nothing if the relatively small 3DS screen was cluttered with icons and interrupted by the constant pausing to change equipment. Thankfully, Nintendo has relocated all of that to the bottom screen, enabling you to swap equipment or check the map by touching the relevant icon, and all without cutting away from the action on the top screen.

■■■ SO IS *OCARINA Of Time 3D* the perfect remake? Not quite. The gyro controls are probably the weakest part of the package. You get the feeling that Nintendo has included them more to show off the capabilities of the hardware than because they particularly suit the game itself.

They work well enough, of course. Reserved for anything that takes place in first-person, such as the look function and weapons like the slingshot or bow, it smoothly allows you to look around the world in a way that's the most responsive and precise we've seen on 3DS to date. But, like every other 3DS game, the gyro controls sit uncomfortably alongside the 3D display, blurring the world out of focus under anything but the tiniest movements. You can always opt to simply use the analogue stick, of course, but it's a shame that Nintendo left in something that does its game no favours, even if it is optional.

And then there's the bonus content. Every celebratory repackaging needs to flesh out its offering with enough new stuff to satisfy fans, and *Ocarina* certainly piles on the extras with its new boss rush mode and the inclusion

SPEND SOME TIME WITH THE 3D AND YOU'LL SEE WHY NINTENDO MADE IT A FLAGSHIP 3DS TITLE

of the *Master Quest*, only previously available on a GameCube disc that was never officially sold in shops. Their inclusion adds great value to the package but it seems odd that Nintendo chose to lock them out until the regular version of the quest has been completed. Veteran *Zelda* fans have played the main game countless times and would definitely prefer to jump straight into the *Master Quest* from the start.

These minor flaws aside, however, *The Legend Of Zelda: Ocarina Of Time 3D* is an essential retro remake. Perfectly respectful to the original while updating it to modern standards, it's one of the best games ever made, now made even better. If you're a lifelong fan of the game then this is the definitive version to treasure. And if you've only recently gotten into the series then this is the best way to experience what the fuss surrounding its most critically acclaimed instalment is all about. **g**
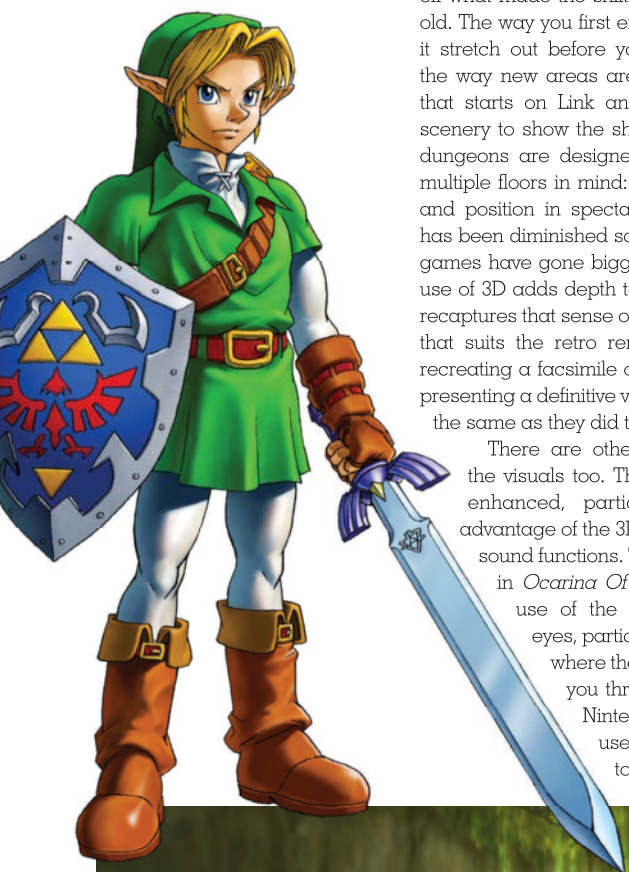
VERDICTS

One verdict isn't enough for a title that aims to cater to different audiences. So here's our guide to all of them…

THE RETRO ENTHUSIAST

■ *The Legend Of Zelda: Ocarina Of Time 3D* respectfully updates the original Nintendo 64 game in a way that recaptures the feeling of 1998, if not the look. The inclusion of the *Master Quest* is a fantastic extra for dedicated fans, but it would have been better if you could play it from the start. And while we're at it, how about a *Monkey Island: Special Edition*-inspired button that switches between N64 and 3DS graphics? What's here is definitely good, but if you'd prefer to jump straight into *Master Quest* then you'd do better to track down *The Legend Of Zelda: Collector's Edition* on GameCube.

GRADE: B+

THE 3DS OWNER

■ If there's one game that screams at you to buy a shiny new 3DS then it's this one. The 3D visuals aren't just good for a remake, they're quite simply the best demonstration of the technology currently available for the system. Partnered with the perfect game for showing off the benefits of the depth of field that 3D offers, it can't help but excel, and you can see the effort that the developers have put into the effect right there on-screen. Other hardware features like the dual screens and surround sound also get a satisfying workout (the less said about gyro controls, the better) but it's the amazing 3D that begs you to make *Ocarina Of Time* your next 3DS purchase.

GRADE: A

THE ZELDA NEWCOMER

■ IF YOU'RE new to the *Zelda* series then you may believe that there's no better place to start than with one of the newest editions, and until now you would have been right. *Ocarina Of Time* is the series high point, and here in updated form it gets the chance to show off what made it so great, without looking horribly ancient. Some handy additions also help to ease newcomers in, particularly in the optional videos, which give you hints on how to overcome the hardest puzzles and bosses without just doing it for you. If you've always wondered what all the fuss is about then now is definitely the time to find out.

GRADE: A

Second Opinion

How does Ocarina Of Time hold up for those who aren't drawn in by nostalgia alone? We asked Xbox 360 games journalist and Ocarina newcomer Steve Burns to give his independent opinion

■ Like the guy who hasn't seen The Godfather or listened to Sgt Pepper's, admitting among the media fraternity that I hadn't played *Ocarina Of Time* used to be fraught with danger. Usually, I'd be met with snorts of snooty derision, even if I offered that I respected the series' accomplishments.

'How?' my accusers would squeal with mock – I hope – indignation. 'But it's the best game ever!' others would bellow, as if Nintendo's entire PR team had set up office in their throat to berate unbelievers like myself. So taking up **games™**'s offer to get a pair of fresh eyes on *Ocarina* after all these years was a no-brainer, even if my hatred of the fantasy genre is so fierce that it has probably formed its own consciousness by now. Finally, I'd be able to not only get an opinion on it but also enter the tea room and not get stared at by Nintendo zealots like I personally cancelled *Starfox 2*.
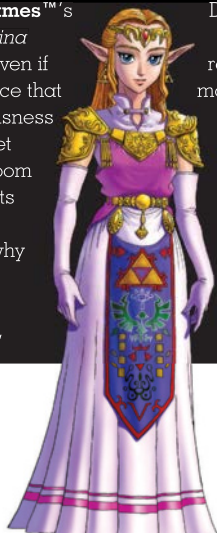
After six to eight hours of play, I see why they were getting so agitated. *Ocarina* is an absolute joy to play, in the purest sense. The world is fantastically formed, with regard to both aesthetics and use of 3D space, and both the questing and exploration feed into this brilliantly. You always feel as if you're moving forward (even if not literally) and the way in which the narrative, the world and your objectives unspool before you truly makes the player feel as if they are exploring and affecting a world, as opposed to simply existing within it.

Hyrule seems as if it would keep going even if you weren't there, and as such when player agency is introduced it only makes the place feel even more special. That the side-quests – little more than timewasters and filler in other games – can pull you in as much as the main quest seems weird at first, until you consider that exploring Hyrule is its own reward. There's no need for some arbitrary incentive when you're having this much fun, which sums up Nintendo at its best.

Despite the fact that PRs and journos love to reach for the superlatives with delirious regularity, *Ocarina* is one of those rare moments where the reality lives up to the hype. It feels special now, so it must have felt like the dawn of a new era in 1998. Considering its legacy in both 3D action (Z-lock) and open-world adventure is still felt today, that's not too far off the mark. So congratulations Nintendo zealots, you have a convert. *Super Smash Bros.* is still shit though.

Steve Burns, X360 Magazine

Eiji Aonuma Producer Q&A

To what extent does *Ocarina Of Time 3D* represents Nintendo's original vision of the game?
It is a faithful remake of the original. The specs of the Nintendo 3DS allow for improved graphics and processing speeds, and we have made it more user friendly by adding in intuitive touch panel and gyro sensor controls, but all of these new features just serve to further bring out the much-loved qualities of the original game.

Of all the changes and additions that have been made, which are you most proud of and why?
The touch panel on the second screen allows users to seamlessly change items or view the map and means that they don't need to break their concentration from the game to do so. I think that this has a very positive effect on the game.

How well suited do you think *Ocarina Of Time* is to a handheld? Did you have to make any changes to make it more suitable?
We haven't really made any changes, but being able to open your Nintendo 3DS anywhere at any time to enter the huge world of Hyrule and then being able to enter Sleep Mode and return straight away to the real world allows us to always feel close to the game. This is a huge benefit to people like us who live in the busy modern world.

Why did you select Grezzo as co-developer? Are you a fan of Koichi Ishii's *Secret Of Mana*?
This was my first time working with Grezzo and Koichi Ishii. I felt that they cared even more about *Ocarina Of Time* than we as the original developers, so I was confident that they could put together a great remake that stays true to the original. I was definitely right – without them we could never have done it.

What are your thoughts on future 3DS *Zelda* games? Would you do a new *Zelda* game or another remake… *Majora's Mask*, perhaps?
There are a lot of people who want a remake of *Majora's Mask*. It was an addictive game where you are always conscious of the flow of time. Being able to enter Sleep Mode and easily suspend the game on the Nintendo 3DS would allow us to make a more user-friendly version of the game, but actually we are also very interested in making a completely new *Zelda* game for the Nintendo 3DS.

BEST BOSS

SUPER SMASH BROS. NINTENDO 64 [Nitnendo] 1999

■ Mario, Link, Kirby and Samus thrown into the arena to duke it out over… what exactly? Don't look for reason or rhyme in the curious concept of Sakurai's *Smash Bros.* series, because it's simply not there. To epitomise all the unrelenting nonsense, HAL Labs saw fit to add an ominous giant glove as the final enemy, who drifts into the arena at the conclusion of the arcade trial. The most interesting aspect of the Master Hand's appearance is how it subverts the rules of *Smash Bros.* up to that point, tasking the player to gradually chip away its HP as it unleashes a volley of screen-consuming attacks – each derived from various villains from Nintendo's heritage. But, let's be honest, it's rather anticlimactic after surviving the gamut of legendary fighters up until that point. But it's the very fact that it's such a bizarre inclusion is the very reason why it remains so memorable. We don't know why you exist, Master Hand, but we're sure glad you do.

16%

300H.P

GAME CHANGERS

THE LEGEND OF ZELDA: MAJORA'S MASK

Released: 2000 **Publisher:** Nintendo **Developer:** Nintendo EAD **System:** N64

You put the Deku princess in a bottle!

Majora's Mask was one of a few N64 titles that required Expansion Pak support, as its cleaner textures and detailed backgrounds required the extra 4Mb of RAM.

Succeeding one of the most critically acclaimed titles ever made, this more nuanced Zelda entry is an example of a game that was way ahead of its time

DESPITE ITS BRILLIANCE, it almost seems anarchic to claim that *Majora's Mask* is a more forward-thinking and influential title than its older sibling, *Ocarina Of Time*. Although *Ocarina* revolutionised 3D gaming, tearing up the adventure game rulebook in the process, *Majora's Mask* was a work of experimentation and, ultimately, innovation. Through building upon the wonderful framework pioneered by the previous game, Nintendo managed to push its 64-bit console to the limit and in the process created a franchise entry with an unprecedented amount of depth.

This depth arises from multiple junctures. Although the basics of the game are the same as that of *Ocarina*, *Majora's Mask* is more a manifestation of creativity than a tour de force of mechanical design. Seen in the game are various concepts that weren't present in *Ocarina Of Time*, and so at its root it feels more like a work of heart – a risky yet confident segue into uncharted territory for the series.

Of course the exemplary gameplay and graphics inherent in *Ocarina Of Time* had been brought forward for Link's second N64 outing. The game was built in the same engine as its predecessor and utilised the same graphics package, therefore enabling the development team to turn the game around in only a year, compared to the four-year development cycle enjoyed by *Ocarina*. The same combat returned – complete with strange camera mechanics – as did a focus on dungeon crawling and elements of open-world exploration. However, this is where the comparisons to *Ocarina* end.

In narrative terms *Majora's Mask* strikes a more adult chord. Opening with Link riding through a misty forest to search for a friend, the game introduces the Skull Kid, sporting the game's eponymous facial attire. This mask was stolen from the Happy Mask Shop salesman, found in Hyrule market in *Ocarina Of Time*, and he hints at an ancient apocalyptic power that resides within it. Link enters Clock Town in

ADVENTURE TIME | MAJORA'S MASK PROVED ITSELF TO BE A MORE THOUGHTFUL EXAMPLE OF THE ADVENTURE GENRE WITH THESE SPECIAL ELEMENTS
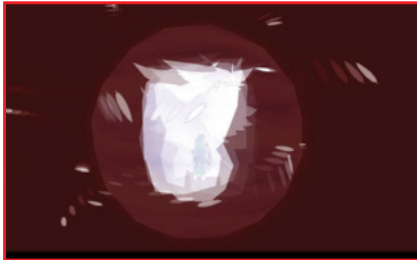
FAST TRAVEL

★ Unlike in earlier *Zelda* titles, Link is able to fast travel in *Majora's Mask*, which goes some way to mitigating the effects of the real-time cycle. Although we are used to seeing far bigger game worlds nowadays, the land of Termina was pretty large for its time and trekking across it with only six in-game hours left is not exactly a formula for fun.

Even though it was only a short time, I feel like I've known you forever.
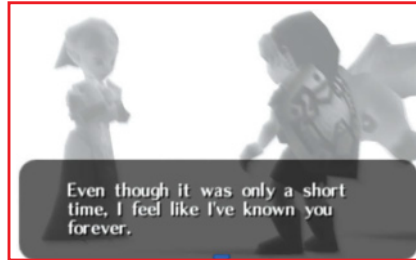
SENTIMENT

★ The *Zelda* series has always done a sterling job of providing moments of emotional heft. These are littered throughout *Majora's Mask* – from seeing the Skull Kid embracing two fairies and crying because he's lonely to the moment when Link experiences a flashback to talking to Princess Zelda, everything here carries a certain weight.

Masked Jungle Warrior
ODOLWA

BOSSES

★ The franchise has never been short of excellent boss fights, but a couple of the mayors in *Majora's Mask* really stand out. Pictured here is the boss at the end of Woodfall Temple, one of the four giants that Link has to face to prevent the moon from falling. The main event against *Majora's Mask* on the moon is one of the best in the whole franchise.

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the land of Termina to find the moon will fall from the sky after three days and destroy the world.

Link sets about conquering four dungeons and the giants within in order to force them out of hiding to stop the moon from falling, enabling him to go up to the moon and face the Skull Kid and Majora's Mask once and for all. This threat carries weight where the likes of Ganondorf never could, as the moon is visibly sinking lower in the sky with every second that passes, and conversations with NPCs reveal their thoughts on the imminent apocalypse.

Masks play far more of a role in the game than they did in *Ocarina*, with a select few proving necessary to progress in the game and allowing Link to shape-shift. These few masks are simple to obtain, however the larger proportion of the 24 masks available in the game require very specific criteria to be met, often at very specific times throughout the game's three-day cycle. This feature still hasn't seen a rival outside of the RPG space to this day. That an action-adventure would display such intricacies is still impressive 14 years later, and highlights the astute nature of the game's design.

THE MOST INTERESTING CONCEPTS ARE THE GAME'S REAL-TIME ASPECT AND TIME TRAVEL MECHANICS

KEY FACTS

■ *Majora's Mask* necessitated the use of the N64's Expansion Pak, so rumours were abound at the time that it was originally a project intended for the 64DD.

■ At the beginning of the game Link is seen travelling through a forest, in search for a friend that isn't named. However, it is considered in all circles to most likely be Navi from *Ocarina Of Time*.

■ Many character designs from *Ocarina* appear in *Majora's Mask*, although not one recurring character recognises Link and no explanation is offered why they now inhabit Termina instead of Hyrule.

■■■ In typical Nintendo fashion the art direction is incredible and the series' ability to neatly theme dungeons and areas around elemental factors are no more apparent than in *Majora's Mask*. Most surprising is the depiction of the moon's surface, as when Link arrives it is revealed to be a vast, colourful field with a lone tree at its centre – further proof of the game's unwillingness to resort to the familiar.

However, the most interesting concepts at work in *Majora's Mask* are the game's real-time aspect and, in turn, its time travel mechanics as well. Due to the game's aforementioned three-day cycle, it becomes necessary for Link to use the Ocarina of Time to travel backwards and forwards as he requires. The entire three-day cycle in-game equates to around an hour in real time and is one of the earliest examples of an accomplished real-time system.

A ranch in the south-west of the game world is obstructed by a large boulder, being hacked at by a builder. Return on the third and final day and the boulder has been removed in a tangible way – it takes the builder two days to destroy it, and so the ranch and its associated side-quests are only available when his task is complete. In turn, heading back into Clock Town towards the end of the last day, the player will find it near empty, as most residents have fled in advance of the impending apocalypse.

By introducing the three-day cycle Nintendo incorporated a wonderful narrative framework and a means to cram a vast experience into a cartridge, as the predetermined environmental occurrences are allowed to repeat themselves infinitely when Link travels back to the dawn of the first day, requiring less memory. Through all of these elements *Majora's Mask* rivalled the acclaim of its predecessor and remains a challenging and curious experience.

GAME CHANGERS

TIME BANDITS

MAJORA'S MASK BROUGHT UNORTHODOX TIME MECHANICS TO THE TABLE, BUT SEVERAL OTHER TITLES OVER THE YEARS HAVE BENT THE RULES OF TIME AND SPACE

BLINX: THE TIME SWEEPER

■ A GAME THAT was billed as an essential early exclusive for the original Xbox, *Blinx* allowed players to slow down, speed up and stop time altogether using the titular character's vacuum cleaner. What was interesting here was the time limit of ten minutes for each stage, nudging the player into the position where the game's time mechanics weren't just a gimmick, but essential to progression. Outside of these mechanics, however, *Blinx: The Time Sweeper* didn't particularly inspire, amounting to a slightly above average platformer with action elements.

F1 2013

■ AN INTERESTING ADDITION to this list, yet *F1 2013* uses time mechanics to fix your problems. Having hurtled off the track after a frantic manoeuvre through a corner, players can rewind the action to correct their mistakes. Although the amount of times this function is available is limited, it feels like a strange addition. The *F1* games are known for being hardcore, and by adding this mechanic Codemasters may be guilty of acquiescing to accessibility.

THE LEGEND OF ZELDA: OCARINA OF TIME

■ THE PREDECESSOR TO *Majora's Mask*, *Ocarina Of Time* allowed players to manipulate time. By heading to the Temple of Time in Hyrule Market Link can remove the Master Sword from its pedestal to travel forward in time. This pushes the narrative forward: by replacing the sword you can return to being a child, affecting what happens in the future, and completeing specific side-quests.

CHRONO TRIGGER

■ ANOTHER INNOVATIVE TITLE, and an even earlier example of time travel as a gameplay element. Square's RPG was highly experimental; its time travel component allowed players to travel to different locations and eras, with past events affecting the future. Despite achieving huge success in Japan, a European release for the SNES never happened.
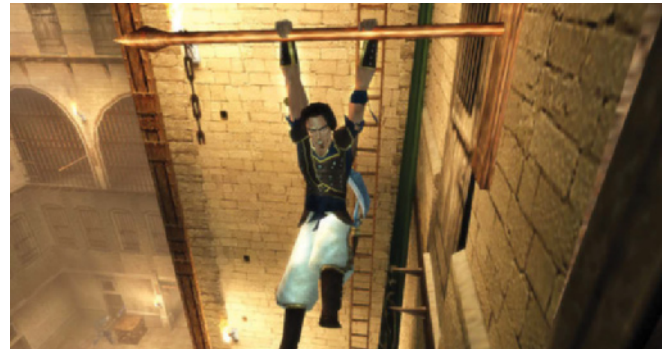
PRINCE OF PERSIA: THE SANDS OF TIME

■ UBISOFT'S ACTION-PLATFORMER was a success upon its release in 2003. Controlling the titular prince, players were faced with dungeons rife with chasms to traverse and enemies to defeat – but the player can rewind time to avoid death. The prince can also use the Dagger of Time to slow time down when attacking enemies, placing the outcome of the fight in the player's hands.

LIGHTNING RETURNS: FINAL FANTASY XIII

■ THE FINALE OF the *Final Fantasy XIII* trilogy features a real-time aspect. NPCs are found in different areas at different times, necessitating the need to learn their patterns to maximise their respective side-quests. At 6am on each game day, Lightning can extend the game clock by a day if prerequisites are met, buying the player precious time before the game clock winds down.

BIOSHOCK INFINITE

■ ELIZABETH COMSTOCK'S ABILITY to open tears between dimensions and time periods not only serves as a narrative device but also adds a new dynamic to the gameplay. The stunning FPS deals with particle physics, religious fervour and crippling guilt, but towards the end of the story Elizabeth's mind-bending abilities come to the fore, resulting in the game wandering off down several separate timelines.
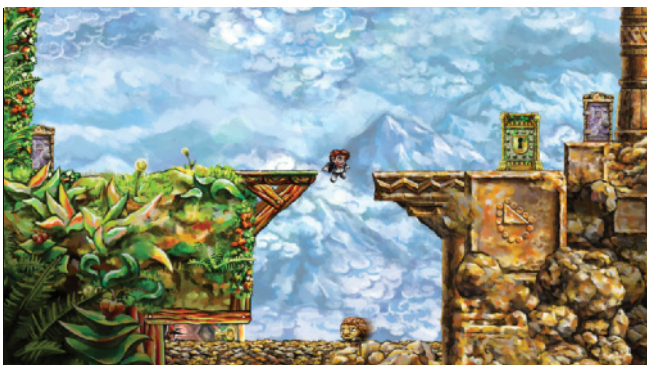
BRAID

■ JONATHAN BLOW'S PASSION project became one of the first 'indie darlings' upon its release back in 2008, and played with time in a way that had never been seen before in a side-scrolling 2D platform game. Players guide Tim through screens solving platform puzzles and have the ability to reverse time, even after dying. The effects vary across chapters, resulting in a deep game that became the highest-rated game on Xbox Live for some time.

TIMESHIFT

■ PUBLISHED BY SIERRA Entertainment after the project was passed on from Atari, TimeShift charted the actions of Dr Krone, a scientist who travels back to the Thirties and assumes control of society. The player travels back to 1939 to confront Krone and restore natural order, eventually defeating him. The player-character has a time-altering arsenal built-in to the suit the protagonist is wearing, allowing him to slow time, stop it or rewind it.

GAME CHANGERS
ANIMAL CROSSING

Released: 15 September 2002 **Publisher:** Nintendo **Developer:** Nintendo EAD **System:** GameCube

Everybody's favourite anthropomorphic musician K.K. Slider is actually named after sound designer Kazumi Totaka. One of Totaka's most recognisable tracks – from various Nintendo titles including *Mario Paint*, *Yoshi's Story*, and *Luigi's Mansion* – is K.K's debut song.

Don't let the cute anthropomorphic animals fool you, 15 years on Animal Crossing is still one of the most realistic life-simulations to ever emerge

WE LOOK TO videogames to seek escapism from adult life, right? Adventure and excitement; comfort and friendship, gaming can give us all of these things from the relative safety of our living room. Why then, with literally thousands of games to choose from, did we ever decide to put ourselves through the terror and absurdity of something like *Animal Crossing*?

Look behind the sweetness and there's something very unsettling simmering below the surface. Is there any way that Nintendo could have known what it was unleashing onto the world when it first conceptualised Japan-exclusive *Dobutsu No Mori*? It's a game that would begin life on the 64DD, the peripheral's internal clock and improved memory used to power the simulation of a real-life village. It was to be a place populated by loveable anthropomorphic mammals, existing in real time to keep you hooked – for Nintendo, it was to be a hugely innovative stride forward.

Following the collapse of the N64's disk drive, Nintendo shifted development, first onto the N64 (*Animal Forest*, 2001)

and eventually, famously, what we now know as *Animal Crossing* appeared for the first time in North America for the GameCube. The 2002 release was seemingly fun, friendly and safe, utilising Nintendo's new system to be the "real life game that's playing, even when you're not."

Looking back, *Animal Crossing* is actually pretty bleak. Sure, it's entertaining at first, but ends up as a torturous reflection of a consumerist, capitalist society. You might not remember it that way, if you haven't played any of the recent iterations, but just think about it for a moment. It's a paper-craft nightmare that launches off of the premise that you – a human in strange new place – have moved to a new village, viewed immediately as an outsider and put to work to pay off a ridiculous mortgage from local embezzler-turned-realtor Tom Nook. It's a game that succeeds, largely, because of how excellently it replicates the loop of our day-to-day lives – the cycle of labour, money and consumption brought to life in the sixth generation of consoles.

BEST CHARACTERS

| WANT TO HAVE A GREAT TIME IN ANIMAL CROSSING?
| MAKE SURE YOU MEET THESE WONDERFUL CHARACTERS

K.K. SLIDER

★ K.K. Slider is the lovable hippy dog that travels to your village every week to sing a few tunes and have a few laughs. While K.K. has appeared in other *Animal Crossing* games, he has decided to become a DJ, which just isn't as cool as the roaming guitarist.

ROVER

★ You should have known going to this village was a bad idea when you got accosted on the train by a talking cat. Rover sits opposite you any time you travel, demanding details such as your name, birthday and location. He says he isn't crazy, but we have our doubts.

PETE

★ We always liked Pete. Unlike our real-life Royal Mail, his postal deliveries are always on time. At 9AM and 5PM he will appear to deliver your mail, and if you befriend him he will even tell a few stories about some of the other villagers.

■ ■ ■ The game thrives off of the fact that you want to engage in a type of fun that acts quite a bit like work – you spend all your time rattling through a list of banal tasks so that you can go relax. Sound familiar? And so you immediately fall into a routine, watching the clock to get your tasks completed before the sun sets. That's a mission made in earnest to earn enough Bells to purchase new tables, decorations and assorted junk to decorate your little slice of homely capitalist heaven.

Animal Crossing also forces you to interact with your neighbours. Each unique, with their own personalities, you'll need to earn their trust through conversation and favours on a daily basis. You'll establish friendships but maybe one day, in spite of your best efforts, they'll move away. You'll be sad but there's little time to dwell; some of your neighbours are upset you didn't talk to them for a few days. They'll make you work damn hard to earn even a simple pleasantry, often testing your reliability and memory with little quizzes – it's ridiculous but somehow utterly engaging, especially as one of them may reward a delivery of fresh coconuts with a brand new television.

Animal Crossing even manages to re-create bouts of unavoidable bad luck: a fortune-teller can curse you

> **THE GAME THRIVES OFF THE FACT THAT YOU'VE SELECTED A TYPE OF PLAY THAT ACTS QUITE A BIT LIKE WORK**

KEY FACTS

■ There are over 15 collectible NES games hidden within *Animal Crossing* that can be found and played from your home. Due to the advent of the Virtual Console, this is the last time the series would include such an option.

■ *Animal Crossing* included special areas that could only be accessed with either a Nintendo eReader or GBA link-up. While they weren't necessary to the game, they sure did help expand its horizons.

and bees will sting you, prompting neighbours to leer and make comments about your misfortunes. You'll be held personally accountable for anything that goes wrong in the village, including weeds springing up should you skip a day of gardening. You'll be assaulted should you make attempt to cheat the system and you'll routinely have Nook on your case about money; but that's *Animal Crossing*, the game that expertly makes busy-work look like play.

It hinges on you wanting to waste time in real time; it's part of the majesty of its design. Using the GameCube's internal clock and calendar, *Animal Crossing* wouldn't just cycle through day and night, but it would ensure everything runs whether you're there or not – and your neighbours would remember. The mailbox piles up with letters, trees would grow tall and weeds would litter the land requiring hours of clean up. It's through this in-game persistence that *Animal Crossing* pulls a wondrous shift in your attitude towards it as time goes on.

Whether it's in a real or virtual life, nobody should live to work. You shouldn't need to die in the pursuit of happiness, because it's there waiting for whenever you accept your lot in life. After weeks spent buying a bigger house, paying escalating loan fees, collecting matching furniture, and dealing with an array of ridiculous citizen concerns, eventually it the time comes to stop doing what you think you *have* to do and just do what you *want* to do.

Travel to your friends' villages to find exotic new fruit, make new buddies, hunt down and play the hidden NES games, and wait outside the station for K.K. Slider – just because. To an extent, what you find in *Animal Crossing* is that which you brought with you. It's a clever reflection of life that builds from the player; it provides an adorable blank canvas for you to paint over with your own memories and experiences. *Animal Crossing* taught us to step back from the monotony of work and to take the time to smell the roses. Just remember to watch out for the bees.

GAME CHANGERS

ESSENTIAL ACTIVITIES IN ANIMAL CROSSING

WORKING IN REAL TIME, YOU'LL NEED TO PATIENTLY PROCEED THROUGH THIS LIFE SIM TO SEE IT ALL

PLANT A TREE

■ Once you've got yourself a little shovel, you'll be able to dig holes and plant stuff in the ground. While this may sound tame, there's an almost magical quality about planting a flower or fruit one day and then seeing a little sprout appear the next. Plus, growing produce is key to keeping the coffers full and Nook off your back.

WAIT FOR K.K. SLIDER

■ One of the coolest things to find in *Animal Crossing* is K.K. Slider, a musician who would arrive in your village every Saturday evening between 8:00pm and 12:00am. Found outside the Train Station, sat on a stool with an acoustic guitar, K.K. sits waiting for you to request a song or ask for him to choose one from the 50 in his repertoire.

MAKE FRIENDS

■ One of the biggest draws to *Animal Crossing* are the animals in the village. Each has their own distinct personality, so figuring out your neighbor's likes and dislikes was key, interacting with them was a key break between jobs, just don't leave your town untended for too long – they might just leave forever; or just hate you. Both are bad outcomes.

REMEMBER TO PARTY

■ There's a huge amount to do in Animal Crossing, but you'll also need to keep one eye on the calendar. Animal Crossing doesn't just follow our time it reflects it. Seasons change and holidays come and go; you'd need to return on Halloween and Christmas to see special parties, outfits and gifts.

TAKE A TRIP

■ It was as easy as adding a second memory card to your GameCube to visit another friend's town. It was kind of impressive for Nintendo at the time, not only did this give you an opportunity to collect new fruit, find unique items, but you could also meet new and unique villagers, some of whom may like you so much that they move into your town.

MESS WITH FRUIT ECONOMY

■ Should you happen to venture into a friend's village or the little island hidden at sea, you'll have the opportunity to snap up fruit and items that aren't local to your area. Grabbing new exports and growing them in your own town can prove to be highly lucrative, plus your picky neighbours will (probably) love it!

LOOK OUT FOR WANDERING FOLK

■ Wandering sales folk would often appear sporadically in your village. A ghostly figure that could clear up all the weeds in the town, a fortune teller with a bad temper and travelling carpet salesmen who want all of your money for fancy rugs. Non-essential to the game? Sure, but the rarity of such appearances made them feel monuments.


GO FISHING

■ Fishing was a fun activity in *Animal Crossing*, even though you mostly pulled junk up from the river and ocean. Not only would this prove to be an easy way to make Bells – Tom Nook would buy any old crap – but you would occasionally come across some rarities. Besides, it's actually pretty relaxing, for some unknown reason.

BEHIND THE SCENES

METROID PRIME

The Metroid series is as much a part of Nintendo heritage as Zelda and Mario, yet its transition into three dimensions was nowhere near as smooth as those two titles. Exclusive to games™, Retro Studios explains just how it managed to pull off such an amazing feat against all the odds

Morphology: Meta Ridley
Genetically enhanced Ridley
metaform.
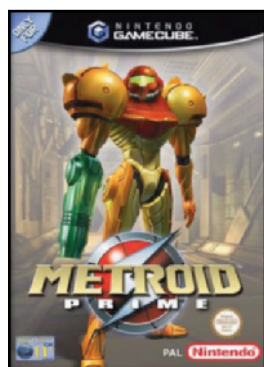
Released: 2002
Format: GameCube
Publisher: Nintendo
Developer: Retro Studios

KEY STAFF:
Mark Pacini
(lead designer),
Bryan Walker
(senior producer),
Michael Kelbaugh
(Retro CEO)
Shigeru Miyamoto
(producer)

IT'S NOT OFTEN that magazines give out perfect scores. Those still playing around with percentages seldom dare break the 95 per cent barrier. But for a magazine that scores out of ten, a title deserving of that elusive top mark is the rarest of gaming treats. What qualifies a game to receive such an honour is very much dependent on the publication in question, and yet you'll often hear talk of 'innovation', 'near perfection' and 'sheer playability' when discussing high scores. So imagine our surprise when, in only our second ever issue, a game came along that was deemed worthy of this ultimate accolade. As with any high mark, this decision was debated at almost tedious length until it was finally settled upon that the game was deserving of top honours. That game was none other than *Metroid Prime*.

Like all Nintendo franchises, the *Metroid* series is blessed with a huge army of avid fans that will be there every step of the way. But unlike any other long-running Nintendo stalwarts, *Metroid* somehow managed to skip an entire generation. While N64 enjoyed Mario, Zelda, Donkey Kong and even Kirby titles aplenty, Samus was left to sit on the subs bench while her creators pondered what should come next. With nothing to satisfy their collective hunger since 1995's *Super Metroid*, fans were understandably delighted to catch a glimpse of Samus in Nintendo's 2000 Space World trailer. Like much of the footage from that event, this proved to be something of a tease, with the proper reveal coming at the following year's E3 show. Samus's return was now very tangible, although there was some concern over the new direction which was seen by many to be simply following market trends rather than doing what was best for the *Metroid* legacy. But upon its UK release in **CONTINUED >.**

METROID HAS AN AVID ARMY OF FANS THAT WILL BE THERE EVERY STEP OF THE WAY

FROM THE
FORUM

Posted by:
SMURPH

▲ I rate it as my favourite GameCube game. The thing is, I still haven't finished it. That last save point was too far away from the final boss, so when it minced me, I had a hell of a trudge to get back to it…

Posted by:
STOOBIEUK

▲ The scanning ruined it for me. Having to scan every little thing made it more like a science project than a game. Mind you, I still bought *Echoes…*

Posted by:
THE INQUISITOR

▲ I love *Metroid Prime*. Every inch of its beautifully crafted world is a joy to explore. From the wonderful, ambient music to the way Samus's visor reflects her face in a certain light, it all adds to the immersion of the living breathing Tallon IV.

Posted by:
KYLE

▲ That feeling of being completely alone, exploring and piecing together the story of Samus, the Space Pirates and the Chozo makes it one of my most rewarding GameCube experiences. I love it.

Posted by:
SOMERSET BUMPKIN

▲ While *BioShock* is praised for telling its story through in-game interaction, *Metroid* is not. The scanning is integral to the atmosphere and helps produce a game that sucks you into its world and offers a sense of adventure and real progression rarely seen. The unique control system enables you to face-off against the bosses in a way that no other FPS can match, and the sense of firepower and differing weapon systems produce boss battles that really complement the game.

March 2003, all doubts were laid to rest. Retro Studios, the development house tasked with bringing Samus into the 21st Century, had come from nowhere, bringing a totally new feel to the series and cementing the *Metroid* name as one of pure quality.

"When *Metroid Prime* was released, no one else was concentrating on the exploration and platforming elements in a first-person game," recalls Mark Pacini, Retro Studios' director and lead designer on *Prime*. "We were dubbed as an FPA (first-person adventure), which to us meant that the core gameplay was not about shooting enemies but rather the immersive experience of being Samus and exploring the environment. We were able to differentiate our game by focusing on those aspects, and I think people felt it to be unique." In a world where *Halo* had just reinvigorated the public's love of first-person shooters, *Prime* was a breath of fresh air – a game with the balls to adopt a first-person viewpoint without following the rest of the FPS blueprint. Not since PSone gem *Jumping Flash!* had we seen this done with similar success – and in many ways, *Prime* is far closer to the quirky jumping rabbit game than to all the bog-standard shooters to which less enlightened sources were so keen to draw parallels. "We also tried to preserve the essence of the *Metroid* experience in its move to 3D," Pacini continues. "It couldn't just be a 3D game starring Samus. It had to be *Metroid*. That was probably the most difficult part of the whole development process."

Having somehow bypassed a generation, Retro Studio was without the benefits so many other franchises had enjoyed from 3D worlds. While it watched Mario, Link et al running around fully realised locations, the last known iteration of *Metroid* was a dimension short. A *Metroid* title hadn't been released for seven years, and then along came *Metroid Prime*. "*Metroid* fans – myself included – were salivating at the chance to play another *Metroid* game," Pacini recounts. If this new (and decidedly late) entry into the series was to captivate the market as Nintendo's other flagship brands had done before, it too would have to take the plunge and embrace the third dimension.

"Mr Miyamoto came to us with the idea of playing a *Metroid* game from the first-person perspective. He

■ If anything, Samus's look, has become more iconic in the 3D age.

felt that the best way to play a 3D game where the character had a gun was from a first-person viewpoint," Pacini tells us, proving that it was once again the vision of Miyamoto that breathed new life into the franchise.

While it is more 'logical progression' than 'ingenious masterstroke', we can't imagine that continuing down the side-on route would have had anywhere near the level of impact that *Prime*'s innovative fusion of genres did. But even the team wasn't sure that Samus really wanted to be bulked out in this way, as Pacini reveals. "At first, we were not seeing his vision and we knew the fans would have the same initial reaction. However, as we started down this path, many unique gameplay opportunities came to light and we began to get very excited about the possibilities. If we were excited, *Metroid* fans probably would be as well."

When quizzed about the driving forces and muses behind the first 3D *Metroid* game, Pacini's reply is

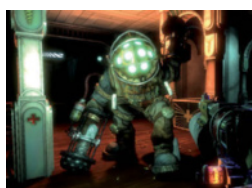SENIOR PRODUCER
Bryan Walker

>. A GAMING EVOLUTION

Jumping Flash! proved you could do first-person platform adventures seven years before *Metroid*.

Photos, audio diaries, even the way new abilities unlock areas, all owe a debt to Prime.

Loving The Alien

THE METROID SERIES is not without its iconic characters and, as it turns out, one of them was painfully close to making an encore appearance. "Probably the one thing I would have loved to include was Kraid as a boss," confirms Mark Pacini. "We had his model completed with some preliminary animations during *Prime*, but the gameplay of the battle was turning out not to be fun and we had to cut it because of time." We'll settle for Ridley because that encounter wasn't exactly the easiest *Prime* threw your way. Any more stress might have finished us off. Development shots placed Kraid in Phazon Mines, although given that his inclusion was never actually finalised, there's nothing to say that's where the rematch would actually have taken place. Neither, apparently, was Kraid ever meant to replace the Omega Pirate, which is a shame since that damned pirate ruined us several times during our Hard mode runs. So is that it then? No more Kraid? Don't be so sure – Pacini is obviously something of a fan of the big green guy and hopes he'll return once more. "Maybe someday," he teases. We certainly hope so.

■ *Metroid Prime*'s strength is in the evocative design of its spectacular alien worlds.

both concise and predictable. "Our main inspiration, without a doubt, was *Super Metroid*. That's all you need." Ties to the sprite-based adventure games of the 16-bit era were evident through every step of *Metroid Prime*. Through progressive upgrades, which allow the player to re-explore old areas and find power-ups or entirely new routes, *Prime* remained true to its heritage in all aspects. But while this move was seen by many as an archaic mechanic to make the game seem larger than it really was, Retro Studios managed to transcend the problems faced by so many games that involve backtracking. Rather than being a chore, traversing the sumptuous and vast world of Tallon IV was a constantly exciting prospect. Whereas so many first-person games that used *Doom* as a template would have you trawl empty corridors looking for a keycard to open a door on the other side of a level, the emphasis in *Metroid Prime* was on exploration, which meant that there was never a dull moment and no dead end could ever be taken at face value. This was adventuring in the truest sense of the word and seeing the world through the eyes of Samus made it all the more engrossing.

■■■ **"During the process** of developing *Metroid Prime*, we asked Retro Studios to incorporate a visor system into the game in order to make it clearly new and differentiated from FPS games," explains Kensuke Tanabe, the game's producer. Having your entire HUD built into a helmet visor like this made all that essential information an integral part of the game's viewpoint rather than just on-screen furniture. And the effects that went along with it remain some of the most impressive to have ever come our way. Your mask steaming up in humid areas, seeing Samus's reflection in the glass when a particularly bright flash occurs… these nuances and minor details may not even have been seen or noticed by some, but their inclusion added immensely to the game's already bountiful atmosphere. But as well as immersing the player in the game world, the visor also served a plethora of other purposes. "We set up the 'Scan Visor', which was a visor that the player used to scan necessary information, as one of plural visors," Tanabe tells us as we recollect the innumerable hours we wasted trying to fill that damned log book. "We thought this feature would help users who wanted to know more information about the setting by actively utilising, for example, a Pirate Log."

Alongside the contextually useful thermal and x-ray visors, the scan visor would go down as one of the most dividing elements to make it into a videogame, especially one as acclaimed as *Metroid Prime*. The information if offered, particularly when dealing with tricky foes or painting a picture of this strange and hostile new world, proved both invaluable and interesting, but there were those who saw it working in parallel with the game's emphasis on backtracking to give a superficial sense of length.

Tanabe is aware of such concerns and tells us that they are being taken into account for the third and final instalment in this part of the Samus legacy. "Because we made it a must to use the scan visor to fully complete the game [by setting up the scan rate], some might not have liked it." But when it comes to scanning, while the love-hate divide may still be with us today, at least Pacini was on hand to give us some concrete reasons for why it was an essential part of the *Metroid Prime* experience. "The main reason for scanning was to give more motivation for the player to look around and explore the environment. It also helped remind the player to use their different visors throughout the game," he explained. "As the series

THE SCAN VISOR WAS ONE OF THE MOST DIVIDING ELEMENTS TO MAKE IT INTO A GAME

has continued, the scanning feature has played less of a role, but we still find it is very useful in terms of giving the player hints and information."

At a time when the GameCube was really struggling to prove itself as an essential piece of hardware and shake its juvenile image, *Metroid Prime* was exactly the game Nintendo needed. A stunning example of what the company's new console could do, *Prime* convinced many people that this was very much a console worth owning. No on can deny the fact that this was the first genuinely outstanding GameCube videogame, but what still amazes us is just how well every single aspect of the game gels to form a congruent and constantly surprising experience. "Retro Studios is very fortunate to have incredibly passionate artists. They're supported by very talented engineers who have provided exceptional rendering tools and technology," explains Retro's Bryan Walker, a senior producer at the studio. "The immersive environments of the *Prime* series are just one example of how well a game comes together when the art, engineering, and design factors all come into alignment." But even though *Metroid Prime* was far more than the sum of its individual parts, we've still managed to overlook one of the main reasons why *Metroid*'s first stab at three dimensions was able to engage us so.

"Probably the feature that really helped immerse the player was the absence of loading screens," Pacini reminds us. "The player was able to play the entire game without a break in the action." With this latest console generation being so unavoidably fond of loading screens, this kind of fluidity is even rarer today than it was when *Prime* was first released. And while it's easy to overlook when assessing exactly what it was that made the game so **CONTINUED >.**

LEAD DESIGNER
Mark Pacini

What We Said...

"It's obvious from the start that the graphics and sound are beyond anything on the console, but it's the in-depth gameplay that'll have you utterly hooked."

games™ issue 02

■ An early 3D model for Samus Aran offers a rare glimpse of the face behind the bounty hunter's mask.

■ Like *Zelda* and *Mario* before it, *Metroid Prime* still contains all the classic gameplay of its 2D predecessors.

good, Pacini is absolutely correct in that it was essential in keeping the player engrossed and immersed. Using a cunning combination of door animations, tunnels and short cut-scenes, *Prime* is one of the most seamless games you'll ever play. "Also, the art style was unique and each room was different," Pacini adds, and as our minds race from the frigid wastes of Phendrana to the wilderness of Tallon IV's overworld, he's once again right on the money. Travelling between such vastly different locations presented numerous challenges, and even within individual locations, exploring your surroundings is an appealing prospect. Few games can boast that level of variety, let alone blend it all into a single, believable world.

■■■ **Morph Ball sections** that pay homage to the series' 2D roots completed the package and made it perfectly clear that Retro Studios was keen to stay as true to what the fans knew and loved as possible. So, was making the game tricky in places also a flashback to the punishing difficulty of so many older games? Tanabe jumps straight in. "These days, such games that a player can complete by just spending time playing without deeply thinking may tend to be welcomed more. From that perspective, *Metroid Prime* can be seen as a very tough game." We barely have time to realise that he's just basically told us we're awful at games before he continues.

RETRO CEO
Michael Kelbaugh

REVOLUTIONARY AND CLASSY, PRIME IS ONE OF THE GREATEST GAMES OF OUR TIME

"However, Nintendo's game philosophy is that we hope users feel accomplishment and are impressed by thinking while playing the game. We also want players to feel their skills are improving." This is something that *Prime* does beautifully and not long after you've earned the respective abilities, you'll be Morph Ball double-bomb jumping and leaping between grapple points unstoppably. Pacini interjects at this point. "*Metroid Prime* was created with the core gamer in mind, but there wasn't a specific intention in making the game difficult," he states clearly before Tanabe gets the last word on the subject. "As a whole, we did not intend to make it extraordinarily difficult as Mark said, and even a casual gamer like me could manage to clear the game."

Unsurprisingly, 18 months after the release of *Metroid Prime*, the inevitable sequel followed, the cunningly titled *Metroid Prime 2: Echoes*. While its themes of light and darkness were certainly interesting and it didn't divert too much from the blueprint laid out by the original. Samus's interaction with friendlies and a heavier reliance on cut-scenes put paid to the

■ *Metroid Prime*'s use of visors makes it one of the few games to actually make intelligent use of the first-person perspective.

Remote Control
What Retro Studios thinks of the Wii

WHILE OTHER developers um and ah over what to do with Nintendo's new hardware, those clever chaps at Retro Studios know exactly what they want from the machine, not to mention what it offers them in return. "I feel that the Wii has opened up a tremendous amount of creative potential to developers," Michael Kelbaugh says.

"Its innovative design and elegant interface creates entirely new directions and challenges for developers. I mean creatively, not technically. Challenges we're all excited about moving forward to in the future." *Metroid Prime 3: Corruption* has done a good job of convincing us that Samus was an obvious target for Nintendo's magic wand, although

Bryan Walker likes the Wii for different reasons. "The industry's trend of exponentially bigger and more complicated games was leaving behind too many developers with great ideas, and gamers who simply want to have fun," he muses. "The Wii represents a long-overdue chance to revisit the fundamental reasons why we all enjoy games."

overwhelming sensation of loneliness which made *Metroid Prime* so affecting. When Nintendo Wii was unveiled to the press, a heavily modified section of *Echoes* was used to demo how the remote would work to control the game, and by the time you read this the third game should already be out. "We are really trying to make this title as unique as the previous *Metroid Prime* games. The addition of the Wii controller helps bring a new level of interactivity to our game that wasn't possible before," explains Pacini. "But beyond that, we feel it is just as important that the game stands on its own, even without the advantages of the Wii."

And for those of you wondering whether it's just a case of shoehorning a new control mechanic into an old game, the rather quiet Bryan Walker has a few words for you. "From my perspective as the senior producer, the challenge of taking the *Prime* series to a new console with such an innovative controller was both liberating and challenging," he tells us. "Developers can be seduced by new technology and try to apply it in ways that would disrupt or dilute the sense of immersion we value with *Prime*. We had to be mindful that there is a difference between what we could do versus what we should do."

■■■ **With Corruption, Retro** Studios has now finished the *Prime* trilogy and broken brave new ground for this hallowed series. The ingrained similarities to the two existing titles (not to mention the DS spin-off, *Hunters*) mean that this Wii release is unlikely to have the same degree of impact of either *Prime* or *Super Metroid*

before it, but we have few doubts that the leap onto new hardware will treat the series well. And it's all thanks to the groundwork laid by the team with the original *Metroid Prime* – a stunning title that stands up exceptionally well even as the next generation of software continues to wash over us.

Revolutionary, inspired and above all classy, *Prime* will forever stand as testament to Retro Studios' commitment and ability, and as one of the greatest videogames of our time. Indeed, GameRankings has it down as the third best game ever created (behind *Ocarina Of Time* and the original *Soul Calibur*) based on press and online reviews. In turn, this makes it the best-received game of the last millennium. Plus, of course, it was **games™** magazine's first ever 10/10-scoring game, a fact Retro Studios' president Michael Kelbaugh is still proud of. "We are very aware and honoured with such prestigious recognition. It is very motivating as we continue to strive to meet the expectations of you, your readers and all *Metroid Prime* fans."

All that remains is for Tanabe to look to the future as the curtains close on this chapter of Samus's career. "The *Metroid Prime* trilogy over Phazon is over for now. However, I am thinking about some new development for the *Prime* series, just like we did with *Hunters* for DS," he tells us. So, perhaps it won't be long before we see our favourite bounty hunter again. "And Mr Sakamoto, who created the original *Metroid* game, is probably thinking about some new idea." We're sure he is. And we'd very much like to play it. See you soon, Samus. See you soon. ⓖ

PRODUCER
Kensuke Tanabe

■ For a franchise that missed out on an N64 incarnation, it's ironic that *Metroid* has since become Nintendo's most important series.

GAME CHANGERS

VIEWTIFUL JOE

Released: 26 June 2003 **Publisher:** Capcom **Developer:** In-house **System:** GameCube

Viewtiful Joe was an original IP from Hideki Kamiya, responsible for overseeing the likes of Resident Evil 2, Devil May Cry, Bayonetta and the upcoming Xbox One exclusive Scalebound

A forgotten Capcom gem, this was the GameCube game that redefined action in the most stylish way imaginable

THERE ISN'T ANOTHER action game on the planet that evokes the same sentiment of stylish, unbridled joy as the original *Viewtiful Joe*. Even now, 13 years on from its original release, it's still a masterclass in fluid action; Hideki Kamiya's fast and furious love letter to cinema and a dying breed of game design. If you take yourself back to 2003, you'll find Nintendo in a familiar situation: struggling to sell hardware and prove to perspective third-party studios that its latest console – the GameCube – was worthy of supporting. Capcom responded in force, pushing five console exclusives into the pipeline as a way of testing the GameCube's capacity to appeal to adults. The fact that the console looked like a big purple lunchbox certainly didn't help their case, but a team of legendary developers working on exciting new projects could surely turn the tide, right?

The Capcom Five, as they came to be known by an enthusiastic audience, were: *P.N.03*, *Dead Phoenix* (which failed to rise from the ashes), *Resident Evil 4*, *Killer 7* and, of course, *Viewtiful Joe*. It was a killer line-up, unprecedented almost. And while *Resident Evil 4* tends to receive most of the attention from this era of unbridled creativity, it was Hideki Kamiya's debut design project that still sends a shot of adrenaline to our hearts. Kamiya, fresh from directing *Resident Evil 2* and *Devil May Cry*, was tasked by the late Satoru Iwata to develop a game from the ground up, and the result is a classic that *should* need no introduction.

And yet, sadly, it does. It should be telling of the sort of developer Kamiya is that he chose to make his debut title on next-generation hardware a 2D action game. It's a move that's indicative of his brash and subversive development style; a master of the 3D genre stepping back to perfect the side-scroller and give the fixed-camera style he so lovingly propagated with *Resident Evil 2* and *Devil May Cry* one last hurrah.

BEST BOSS
VIEWTIFUL JOE HAD SOME GREAT BOSS BATTLES, THESE ARE OUR FAVOURITES

THE IRON OGRE

★ There's a lot of cool content in *Viewtiful Joe*, though it may be the appearance of Hulk Davidson that really sells it. He is, after all, a giant dinosaur riding a hog and wielding a battle-axe. It's not the most challenging fight in the game, but it may just be one of the most entertaining.

THE BLADE MASTER

★ This one can grind down your patience pretty quickly if you aren't careful, but there's actually an interesting piece of trivia attached to Alastor - his appearance and attack patterns are actually inspired by *the* Alastor, one of Dante's Devil Arms from the original *Devil May Cry*.

THE INFERNO LORD

★ Fire Leo is a gigantic pain in the ass. His headline battle, a three-phase stretch through button mash hell, has a tendency to test even the most creative of players – though excessive use of your VFX powers usually gets the job done.

The viewpoint was, well, all about the view; putting the player in the position of observer as much as it did an active participant. Kamiya created a world that's viewed through a camera lens – it doesn't follow Joe as he flips and skips through the air, but contorts in an effort to mimic the audience's head movements. The world shifts around Joe. It's almost as if he's zooming through an elegantly built set, our movement of the thumbsticks instructing some invisible studio-technicians behind the scenes to move the stage along.

■ ■ ■ *Viewtiful Joe* is, after all, set in make-believe Movieland. Sure, the story set-up is insubstantial at best – with Joe's girlfriend, Sylvia, being dragged into the reel of an action movie by an on-screen monster, with our hero pulled in right after – but, just as it is with many great action flicks, it isn't something to dwell on. Because with one shout of an ancient, mystical phrase, Joe unlocks his latent powers and is transformed from shlub to cinematic demi-god: "Henshin a-go-go, BABY!"

This isn't a game that simply succeeds from being stylish, it succeeds because the style is the game.

> **THE WORLD SHIFTS AROUND JOE. IT'S ALMOST AS IF HE IS ZOOMING THROUGH AN ELEGANTLY BUILT SET**

KEY FACTS

■ *Viewtiful Joe* was later brought over to PlayStation 2 after Capcom was disappointed with its sales. It was rebranded with a familiar subtitle – *Viewtiful Joe: A New Hope* – though it was, in truth, a mediocre port from Clover Studios.

■ The game features a ton of winks and nods to other Nintendo and Capcom game franchises. Characters inspired by weapons from *Devil May Cry*, weird-cameo appearances from R.O.B the robot and Joe even has a tendency to hum the *Super Mario* theme music.

Dropping into slow motion lets Joe deal out double damage, dodge bullets, and send enemies clattering against one another all over the screen. Zoom drags the camera in close to the ever-vein hero, letting him strike a pose before unleashing an array of ultra-stunning moves on unsuspecting aggressors. And then there's Mach Speed; the ability that lets Joe punch so fast he literally bursts into flames. *Viewtiful Joe* is one of the most fiercely evocative action games ever.

Not only did pulling off these moves make you feel truly, wonderfully powerful, but it also gave way to a subtle combo system that we've still yet to see properly replicated. Multipliers are triggered by knocking enemies into one another; fights quickly escalate by building a hit combo through basic strikes before sending that enemy careering into three or four behind them. The more enemies you can knock into one another, the longer you can keep the sequence of sublime fluidity in motion, the bigger the V-Point reward. Kamiya built a simple combat system that's designed entirely around encouraging creative free-flowing play; the fake audience clapping as you finish a combo with a devastating Red-Hot One-Hundred introducing a self-congratulatory smile on the player's face.

Viewtiful Joe demonstrated Kamiya's love for cinema, but also his understanding of cinematic techniques. Just two years later, *Resident Evil 4* would release and effectively kill the fixed-camera angle for action games, a tight third-person POV becoming the preference for game designers. But then there's always *Viewtiful Joe*, the game that proved that the fixed-camera could continue to exist and thrive, no matter the genre – it's just down to the team behind the lens to ensure that it is used correctly.
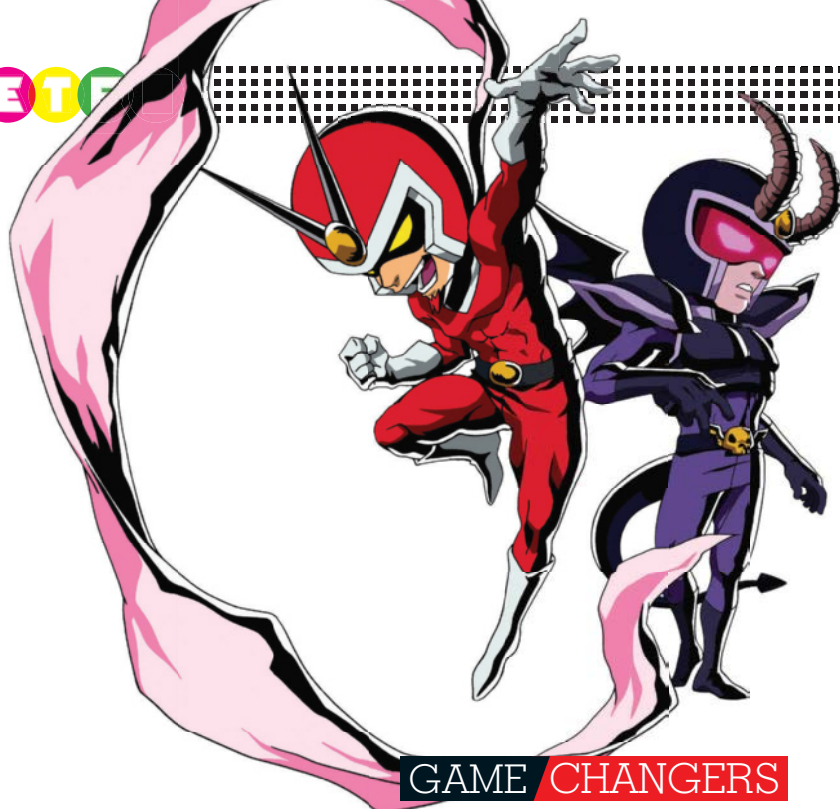
SIX GAMES THE CAPCOM FIVE INSPIRED

IT STARTED AS A PUBLISHING DEAL FOR GAMECUBE, BUT IT LAUNCHED THE CAREERS OF SEVERAL GAMING LEGENDS

THE ORIGINAL 'CAPCOM Five' was a launch collection of the most exciting games of the GameCube era, even if one of them didn't actually make it to the system. *Resident Evil 4*, *P.N.03*, *Killer 7*, *Viewtiful Joe*, and the cancelled *Dead Phoenix* represented a commitment from Capcom to back Nintendo's console in a big way.

Many of these games would prove to be hugely influential, with *Viewtiful Joe* pushing combo-driven combat, *Resi 4* revolutionising horror and third-person shooters, and *Killer 7* opening up the door to grown-up, surrealist experiences (*Deadly Premonition* feels like it has some roots here). But perhaps just as important were the games that the producers and directors behind the Capcom Five would go on to make.

Shinji Mikami, Hideki Kamiya, Atsushi Inaba, Hiroyuki Kobayashi and Goichi Suda (or Suda 51 as he is also known) would all go on to make some incredible games. It's testament to how prolific and impactful these creators were and would go on to be that this list would eventually include *Shadows Of The Damned*,

Project X Zone, *Dragon's Dogma*, *MadWorld*, *Anarchy Reigns*, *Bayonetta*, and *Lollipop Chainsaw*. However, it's only the games that have clear parallels to the original five that we've profiled here.

When you consider the pool of talent that Capcom had gathered at the time, it's a wonder that the GameCube and these titles didn't prove to be more commercially successful. As it was, Capcom wasn't able to keep hold of most of these creators; they went on to form Clover and, after that collapsed, Platinum Games. As the years have gone by, some of their output has begun to lag behind modern gaming trends, but when they embrace their roots, as these games did, they often produce something both incredibly innovative and nostalgic.

Whenever we hear that one of the directors or producers of the Capcom Five has a new project on the horizon, our interest is immediately piqued. With games like these in their histories we always feel confident they can hit upon something again that will capture some of that original magic.

OKAMI

■ Team Viewtiful and many of Capcom Studio 9's R&D talent was transformed into Clover Studios. The studio's goal (with Kamiya at the helm) was to create new IP and they key success story was *Okami*. The 2006 action-adventure game used a beautiful woodcut, watercolour style and is largely recognised as an unsung classic of the PlayStation 2 era.

VIEWTIFUL JOE 2

■ With Kamiya off working on *Okami*, *Viewtiful Joe 2* was put into development with Masaaju Yamada and Atsushi Inaba taking on directorial and production roles respectively, with the latter helping to bring the likes of *Viewtiful Joe*, *Okami* and *God Hand* into the world. A critical darling that once again failed to capture the general public.

VANQUISH

■ Shinji Mikami may not have found success with *P.N.03*, but the developer took many of the basic design philosophies and pushed them into his Platinum Games' debut, *Vanquish*. The wickedly fast, super stylish shooter was a fantastic take on the genre, with its boost-slide mechanic widely regarded as excellently creative.


NO MORE HEROES

■ Suda 51 is known for being rather 'out there' – and that's if we're being generous – on his projects, but it's still bizarre to even consider that this bloody, grindhouse-inspired, Adult-rated action game was a Nintendo Wii exclusive, the console that typically appealed to the younger generation and families.

GOD HAND

■ Showing a commitment to hardcore gamers in the later stages of the PS2's life, as *Guitar Hero* and *Singstar* took over the platform, Mikami's *God Hand* was one of the most brutal and challenging brawlers you could wish to play. It didn't get the best review scores, but those who tapped into its wavelength found it hard to put down.
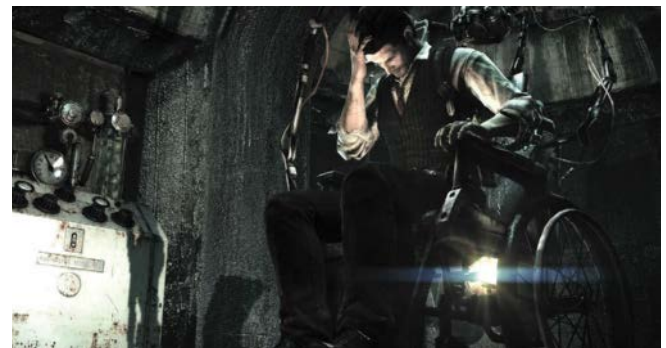
THE EVIL WITHIN

■ Tapping back into his *Resi 4* roots, Shinji Mikami went all-out with his first Tango Gameworks release working with Bethesda. It somehow manages to be even more insane than Capcom's series, more twisted, creepier, but also a little dated in its handling. It honours the past perhaps a little more than it pushes things forward for the genre.

TAKES INSPIRATION FROM THE PAST, BUT ADDS ADDITIONAL LAYERS TO CREATE SOMETHING FRESH, NEW AND FAR MORE FUN

Inset: Comet Stars, which added new challenges to a galaxy, were a great idea in the first game, but it was a pain to wait for them to randomly appear. Now, you trigger their appearance by collecting well hidden or hard to reach medals in each stage.

A STAR IS BORN

Super Mario Galaxy's two-player mode allowed a second player to lend a helping hand via a Pointer-controlled cursor that would shoot starbits, give Mario a boost to his jump with a shake and help push back approaching enemies. It was a gentle way of allowing a parent or child to help another player without completely taking over, but, in the light of the features in *New Super Mario Bros. Wii*, now seems a little regressive. Improved greatly for this sequel, the second player can now take full control of Mario's helpful Luma companion, who is able to perform all of the tasks of old alongside some new tricks – such as the ability to walk through walls and drag power-ups to Mario. His physical presence in the world is a welcome step in the right direction towards a possible fully cooperative 3D *Mario* game at some point in the future.
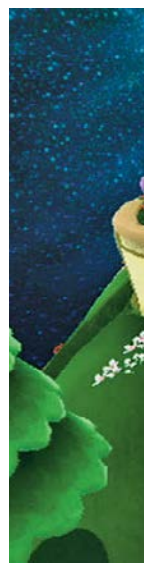
'242 MORE CLASS M PLANETS ON THE RADAR, CAPTAIN'
Super Mario Galaxy 2*

DETAILS

FORMAT: Wii
ORIGIN: Japan
PUBLISHER: Nintendo
DEVELOPER: In-House
PRICE: £39.99
RELEASE: 11 June
PLAYERS: 1-2
ONLINE REVIEWED: N/A

Back in issue 95, we spoke to _Mario_ creator Shigeru Miyamoto about the continuing significance of retro games. "I think they remind us of the importance of the very basic structure of videogames," he told us. "Knowing that basic structure when creating a new game will have a huge difference compared to if you weren't aware of the basics." We assumed he was just speaking generally at the time, but, having since played through the entirety of Miyamoto's latest, we're inclined to believe that he's been forcing his younger employees to play old NES games for some time.

One of the planets that make up the world of _Super Mario Galaxy 2_, for example, re-imagines _Frogger_, but with the cars and logs replaced by plates of rock floating on a volcanic globe. Stay on one too long and you'll drift into a wall of lava. Another recalls _Donkey Kong_ in its design, except that the barrels are goliath stone cylinders that Mario must run beneath, nimbly finding safety between the cracks in the rock's surface. Later still, the design evolves to accommodate a more complicated structure akin to Game Boy's _Donkey Kong 94_, putting Mario's gymnastic abilities to the test. Other influences, meanwhile, reach further afield... Could Miyamoto and company really have played Shaun Southern's 1986 C64 classic, _Trailblazer_? Common sense says not, but a level in which Boulder Mario hurtles along a treacherous suspended path says otherwise.

But we don't want to give the impression that _Super Mario Galaxy 2_ is just a series of retro references. This isn't an homage to the nostalgic games of old, but tangible proof of Miyamoto's theory – a modern game that isn't afraid to look back while also hurtling forward. Its classic designs take inspiration from the past but then twist those influences and add additional layers to create something fresh, new and much, much more fun. Which, as the first true numbered _Mario_ sequel since 1988, is a theme that runs throughout _Super Mario Galaxy 2_.

The overall concept and gameplay may be the same as in 2007's _Super Mario Galaxy_ but, just like those subtle retro inspirations, those concepts are taken to new extremes and expanded upon rather than regurgitated. This is a rare and opportunistic move for Nintendo and, by extension, its audience. _Super Mario World_ set a precedent for the _Mario_ series, all the way back in 1990, that each hardware generation would host only one new proper platform game starring the famous plumber. This meant that each brought with it incremental graphical updates and routinely overhauled gameplay design, from _Mario 64_'s non-linear structure to

Sunshine's water-powered jetpack and _Galaxy_'s spherical worlds. But it also meant that those ideas were never fully developed in a sequel, never befitting from the refinement that made games like _Uncharted 2_ and _Mass Effect 2_ – and so many other games ending in a '2' – that much better than their progenitors.

Super Mario Galaxy 2 is that sequel – much more polished than the last, equally flawless jewel of a game. It may lack that immediate feeling of the new that the first _Mario Galaxy_ enjoyed, but it is undeniably a better and more varied experience. Old friends, such as the bee suit and Boo power-ups, admittedly return, but not a single galaxy or level design is re-used.

Instead, Mario leaps, flips and flies through a goliath series of levels filled with the sort of boundless invention that makes 99 per cent of other videogames look tired and stale.

The re-introduction of Yoshi obviously plays a huge part in this. More than just a simple steed, his newfound powers, activated by consuming various types of fruit, make him as flexible a hero as Mario himself. The speedy sprint of the Dash Pepper, the path-illuminating Bulb Berry and the inflating Blimp Berry all do what great Mario power-ups should do - fundamentally

ENHANCED
IMPROVING ON THE ORIGINAL

OLDIE, BUT GOODIE: With no new central hook to rely on, _Galaxy 2_ excels through good old-fashioned level design and a refinement of previous concepts into something resembling perfection.

Left: As is usual with the _Mario_ games, each level uses big incentives to encourage you to try advanced techniques, such as the long jump.

BETTER THAN → NEW SUPER MARIO BROS

JUST LIKE → SUPER MARIO GALAXY

Left: The second player can use the Pointer to stall enemies, thereby lending Mario a literal helping hand.

change the way that you travel through the world while introducing their own particular risk/reward mechanic. The introduction of Yoshi's Pointer-controlled tongue, meanwhile, gives the dinosaur the ability to eat and spit out enemies, or swing from key points, with a speed and precision not felt (and not even possible) in traditionally controlled 3D action games.

Mario too has been blessed with a couple of new powers, such as the ability to transform into a rolling boulder or the power to create a series of clouds beneath his feet. And while these are undeniably fun power-ups in their own right, it's the way the levels are designed to accommodate them that truly makes them exceptional. Clouds, for example, take on a whole new life when you factor in windy levels, blowing Mario directly into harm's way unless the player thinks fast and acts faster.

Though power-ups may grab the headlines, it is the level designs and their virtual toy box of interactions that are the true stars of *Super Mario Galaxy 2*. Endlessly inventive and constantly surprising, these new galaxies take the fundamental *Mario* designs present since the N64 and evolve them, often with the addition of just one simple change, into previously unexplored concepts. One level, for example, takes the clichéd ice and lava levels present in nearly all platform games and mashes them into one design that eliminates any staleness entirely. Starting off simply by switching the surface between hot and cold, the level soon becomes much more devious, as you find yourself rolling a giant snowball across a lava field, laying down a limited icy path as the ball melts away.

Elemental change plays another key role on a planet made almost entirely of water. While Mario is able to swim straight through its middle, the level can only be finished by switching the entire globe to ice and skating along its surface. Chompworks Galaxy, meanwhile, is essentially a huge *Marble Madness* machine, except that Mario must run through the machine to operate all the switches, ramps and lifts for the marble (a giant Chomp) to take its course, and all without him getting caught in the machinery, scuppering its progress and bringing himself to harm.

Want even more innovation? How about Boo Moon Galaxy, in which the pages of a book-like planet open and close to create new platforms and structures where there were once none? Or there's the level in which Mario rides a boat made of sand; every time it passes through a cactus, or other objects, such as a randomly rolling Chomp, it crumbles away momentarily, leaving little room for Mario to manoeuvre without falling into

Right: The two-player mode is much more in-depth than in the first *Galaxy*, but we'd love to see it evolve into a full co-op 3D *Mario*, as in the original brief for *Super Mario 64 2*.

the deadly quicksand below. Or how about the boss battles, particularly the new showdowns with Bowser? Taking *Galaxy*'s playful gravity-based mechanic to entirely new heights, in what can only be called 'Intergalactic Butt Stomp Snooker', they set a new technical watermark for the series, and inspire awe in ways more associated with the likes of *Bayonetta* or other similarly outlandish action games.

Over-the-top level design and exuberant action aren't the only qualities in common with Hideki Kamiya's finest, however. There's also the matter of difficulty. *Super Mario Galaxy 2* may just be the hardest game in the series since 1986's mischievously tricky *Lost Levels*. Yet while that game seemed to take a sadistic pleasure in knocking Mario's extra lives down to zero, *Galaxy 2* is more even-handed in its difficulty. Purple coin challenges, score attack missions and tight time trials may be some of the toughest levels to crack, but they're also the sort of challenge that's enjoyable to take on. In fact, *Super Mario Galaxy 2* is an extremely rare game, in that it actually becomes more fun the more difficult it is – a fact illustrated by the largest amount of 'post-

FINGERPRINT
WHAT MAKES THIS GAME UNIQUE

ALL THE PEOPLE, ALL THE TIME: An all-pleasing experience, *Galaxy 2* proves you charm the masses without a Balance Board and thrill the hardcore without guns or cars.

Right: There's no turning into paint upon contact with water this time. Yoshi has been realized much better than in any other 3D *Mario*.

SUPER MARIO GALAXY 2 MAY JUST BE THE HARDEST GAME IN THE SERIES SINCE 1986'S MISCHIEVOUSLY TRICKY LOST LEVELS

Below: Many of the minigame-like challenges revolve around combo-based score-attack games that practically drag you back in for one more go.
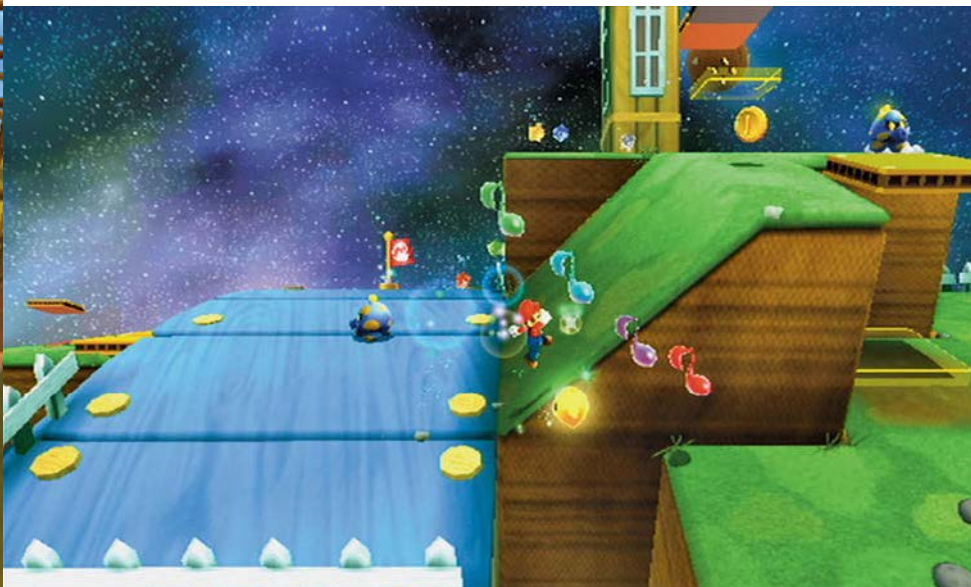
THIS IS YOUR EXTRA LIFE

While the level designs of *Super Mario Galaxy 2* share DNA with several non-Nintendo retro games, there are also some more deliberate references to the *Mario* series as a whole. *New Super Mario Bros.* and *Super Mario World* are obvious influences, but we're certain that every *Mario* platform game gets a nod in one way or another. Supermassive Galaxy pays tribute to both *Super Mario Bros 3*'s Giant Land and *Super Mario 64*'s Tiny-Huge Island, while the latter game gets extra special treatment, thanks to the welcome re-appearance of Whomp's Fortress, complete with whole new challenges. The first *Mario Galaxy* is revisited in the post-game content, while even the unloved stepchild, *Sunshine*, is offered tribute with the appearance of several Piantas.

game' content yet seen in a *Mario* title, where the most fiendishly difficult tests of the player's ability reside.

'Just one more go', is the phrase you'll need to memorise for these later levels, but not before you've finished the relatively painless main quest. Making good on Miyamoto's promise of a more difficult yet more accessible game, a lot has been done to ease new players into the complex 3D playground of modern *Mario*. And while much has been made of the tutorial DVD that comes packed in the box, it's the way in which the game itself gradually removes the stabilisers that is most effective. Opening with a series of interactive cut-scenes, the first chapter actually starts off with a *New Super Mario Bros.*-style 2D perspective that keeps gameplay as simple as possible before incrementally shifting the perspective, and Mario's controls, to full 3D.

It's a wise move, particularly given how significantly more popular Mario's 2D adventures have been with a mainstream audience, and it's one that Nintendo continues throughout *Galaxy 2*. Take the hub world, or lack of one, for example. The castle of *Super Mario 64*, and the holiday resort of *Sunshine*, could prove a little too much for the uninitiated, unable or unwilling to play hide-and-seek with the levels themselves. Yet the compromise, *Super Mario Galaxy*'s empty and un-involving space station hub world, alienated those players who loved the idea of exploring a world outside of the main game. The solution? Get rid of it entirely, returning to the world map that served *Super Mario World* so well in the past, putting the levels front-and-
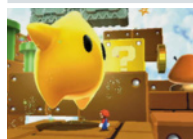
centre where they can't be missed, and making everyone aware of the existence of secret galaxies while still forcing players to earn them through various in-game currencies. The one amateur-friendly aspect of the hub world – the ability to practice Mario's moves – remains in Mario's spaceship, an optional planetoid, which adds new tutorials following key points in the quest and is ever-present throughout the plumber's adventure. Further concessions appear throughout, including in-level video screens for teaching newcomers the finer points of Mario's athleticism, and Cosmic Guide, *Galaxy*'s equivalent of Super Guide, which can temporarily take control of Mario should a struggling player wish it, but which will reward level completion only with a bronze star that does not count toward the player's total of finished levels.

Generous to newcomers, without ever compromising the needs of the hardcore, *Super Mario Galaxy 2* is the closest the 3D action genre has come to genuinely catering for both poles of the gaming audience at the same time. But all this would be for nothing if the game itself was not fun. Thankfully, no matter which side of the gaming coin you come from, this whole new universe of planets is the most inventive, exuberant and, yes, fun set of challenges and diversions yet seen in the platform game genre. It miraculously outclasses a game that many believed could not be bettered, and once again leaves us wondering just how close Nintendo's bar has come to reaching its theoretical peak.

VERDICT **10**/10

THE Wii HAS NOTHING LEFT TO PROVE

NINTENDO'S UNSUNG STRATEGY SERIES RETURNS WITH A SLEEPER CLASSIC IN THE MAKING

Fire Emblem: Awakening*

The modern trend towards easier, more accessible games was always likely to prompt a backlash, and so a raft of recent titles has endeavoured to remind us just how much videogame death matters. In the likes of *Dark Souls* and *ZombiU*, dying isn't merely a minor pothole in an otherwise flawlessly surfaced road to the finish, but a matter of great significance, carrying tangible narrative and mechanical weight. Of course, *Fire Emblem*'s been quietly pulling a similar trick for years now: if a character suffers a fatal injury on the battlefield they're gone forever. Intelligent Systems doesn't always kill them all off – a character might hobble away from the frontline to lick their wounds – but either way they'll never fight by your side again. *Awakening* ups the stakes by really making you care about its cast: a battle isn't simply about winning but emerging victorious with everyone still alive. Leave no man, woman or shape-shifting rabbit-person behind.

Here, it's the quality of the writing that really drives that message home, an expert localisation fleshing out a terrific bit of swords-and-spells fantasy. Its story is familiar but compelling: a little episodic in places, but with a solid arc that sees you attempting to unite a kingdom against the imminent arrival of a seemingly unstoppable evil. More importantly, it's populated by a large cast of characters who, even when they're transforming into dragons mid-battle, are grounded by recognisably human traits. Unusually, while your chosen avatar plays a pivotal role in the plot, they're not the de facto hero. That responsibility falls to the ceaselessly stoic Chrom, though the bonds you forge with him and his band of warriors are not only crucial from a story standpoint, but are deeply knotted into *Awakening*'s systems.

Ostensibly, little has changed. You still compete on grid-based battlefields, engaging in turn-based tactical battles that are intertwined with traditional role-playing tropes of levelling and classes. As ever, axes beat lances beat swords beat axes, while flying steeds offer range and power while facing grave danger from magic and bow users. But a new idea transforms it utterly: here you can pair up with allies for significant bonuses. Place two units in the same square and one will offer the other support in battle. Any unit under attack stands a greater chance of avoiding incoming blows or increasing their hit rate with a friend by their side. Further benefits are offered when a relationship blossoms: a successful

Above: Visit your barracks and you can eavesdrop on conversations that may give you stat or relationship boosts. A neat touch sees the bare room fill up with books, weapons, banners and other detritus as you progress.

pairing will engage in support conversations outside battle that directly impact combat. Comrades will sometimes strike a second blow after the first has landed, though this is nothing compared to the heartstopping moment when you leave a Pegasus Knight within range of an enemy archer, and a Cavalier nobly leaps forward to deflect the potentially deadly arrow to safety. Accidents can and will happen – you might, for example, take a calculated risk against an enemy with a low hit rate who ends up catching you with a lucky shot – which encourages cautious, methodical play. Not just as you might well grow

Above: An auto-battle option is a thoughtful addition for when you have the upper hand in battle and just want to finish off the enemy stragglers, but you shouldn't rely on it unless you're absolutely certain of winning.

FIRE EMBLEM: AWAKENING IS AS GOOD AS ANYTHING NINTENDO HAS PRODUCED IN THE LAST FIVE YEARS

BETTER THAN

FIRE EMBLEM: SHADOW DRAGON

AS GOOD AS

ADVANCE WARS
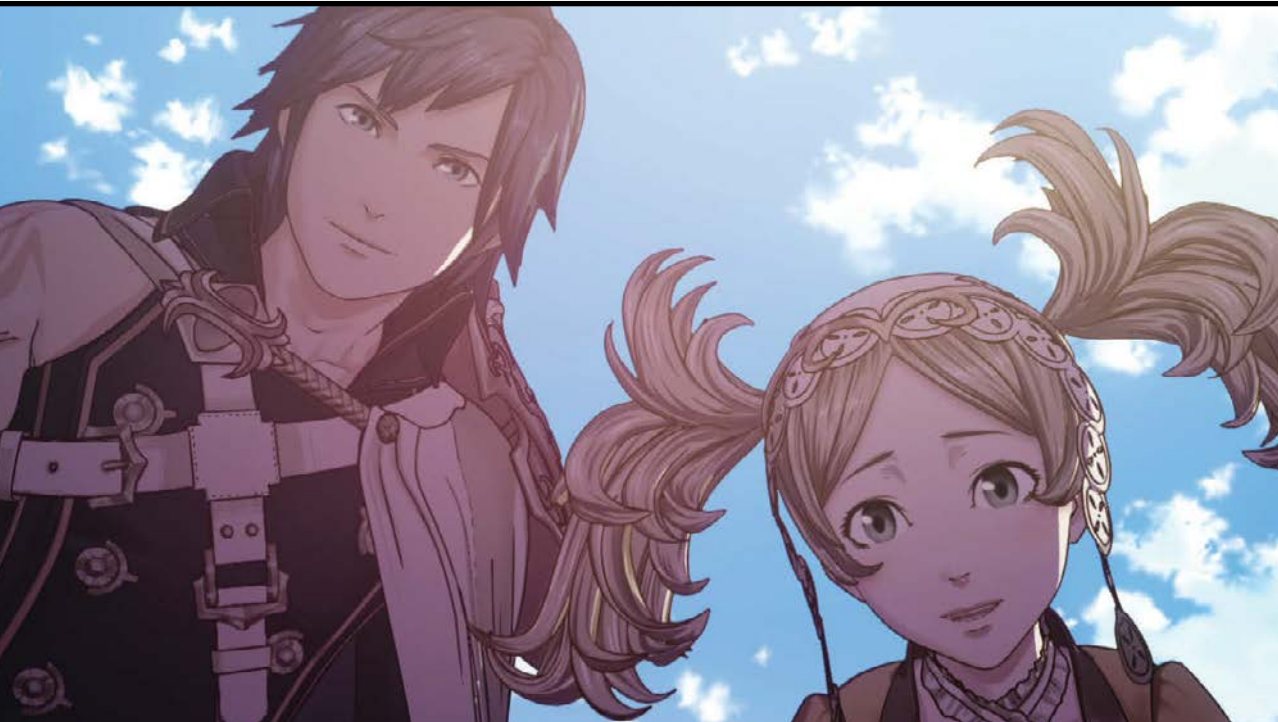
FAQs

Q. HOW LONG?
You could reach the end within 20 hours if you were rushing. But you won't want to.

Q. WEAK BECOME HEROES?
The seemingly feeble villager Donnel and dancer Olivia are well worth persevering with.

Q. LINKS TO THE PAST?
Characters from previous *FE* titles appear on the map. Beat their army and you can recruit them to yours.

FAMILY TIES

A time-travelling conceit – which, in truth, is never really fully explained – adds extra significance to the emotional bonds you make. Should a male and female character forge an S-rank relationship then they'll bear children who travel back from the future to fight alongside mum and dad. This in turn leads to some interesting conversations as the parents grapple with their offspring being of similar age. Evidently, Intelligent Systems clearly doesn't subscribe to Philip Larkin's notion of parentage: while some carry similar neuroses, the kids benefit from the bonus abilities of both parents. As such, they're worth developing further, becoming some of the most powerful characters in the later game. They're among the most charismatic units, too: we particularly enjoyed the cocksure Inigo and klutzy Cynthia.

fond of the characters and their interstitial dialogues (which range from the amusing to the genuinely touching) but because that unit represents one less ally to choose from. As a SOP to newcomers, there's an option to play with permadeath turned off, but this should be ignored: it lightens the emotional load of the choices and sacrifices you make, and *Awakening* is a lesser experience for it.

Elsewhere, *Awakening* scores highest over past entries in the quality of its presentation. You won't want to turn the combat animations off, such is the visual force of each skirmish, while the potential for unpredictability makes it all the more absorbing: the pre-battle screen might give you an idea of the outcome but it can't vouch for an unexpected critical hit or an ally bravely leaping into the fray. Expressive animation, hit-pauses and anime cutaways heighten the sense of physical weight: fire spells erupt with volcanic fury, and there's nothing quite like a well-aimed spear sending a monstrous rider toppling from its winged steed. Empowering battle cries and stirring orchestral themes play their part in turning every one-on-one into a miniature melodrama. Finally *Fire Emblem* has had as much attention lavished on its presentation as its mechanics, and it makes a big difference.

Every battlefield is different, too: from deserts to villages, castles to wastelands, from the side of a volcano to the roots of a sacred tree. Beyond terrain affecting movement range, the differences between one and the next are mostly cosmetic, though the layout and makeup of the opposing army forces regular tactical adjustments. Side stories, meanwhile, offer both the chance to gain extra battle experience and to recruit additional characters, and are every bit as thoughtfully constructed as the campaign missions. Thorough players who pursue all the support conversations will find the difficulty curve flattening out in the late game, but Hard and Lunatic settings offer a challenge even for *Emblem* experts. Besides, if you're playing it honestly – in other words, accepting the hand you're dealt and refusing to reload after each death – even the best-organised strategist can fall victim to an unfortunate roll of the dice.

The only real disappointment is the simplicity of its objectives and the lack of secondary tasks. One bonus mission is a thrillingly intense backs-to-the-wall defence, but outside raiding chests and seeking out support characters you're rarely called upon to do anything more than defeat a commander or kill everything that moves. Yet in truth, we're grasping for fault where there's very little to be found. *Fire Emblem: Awakening* is as good as anything Nintendo has produced in the last five years, and as such is very, very special indeed.

CONNECTED
EXPANDING THE GAMEPLAY

PASS PLUS: You can select up to ten of your best units to send on StreetPass sorties. Other players you encounter will appear on the World Map, ready to battle when you return.

VERDICT 9/10
A STRATEGY-RPG MASTERPIECE